Luther H. Martin
Deep History, Secular Theory

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Luther H. Martin

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Foreword

I am delighted to see these incisive, seminal articles now brought together in one place—and so revealingly contextualized by Martin's own account of the intellectual journey that forged them. The volume shows one possible trajectory and outcome among those of us who have experienced close-hand the last half-century of the study of religion. Few individual scholars have worked their way through so many of its paths, stages, and critical issues as the author of these selected essays.

For Martin, as he tells us, all this was set in motion in the 1960s by the idea of a secular approach to the study of religion in a public university. As his departmental colleague at the University of Vermont from that time forward, I have witnessed most all of the steps along the way by which Luther has steadily challenged the field's unexamined biases and undeveloped sense of explanatory theory. His essays created stimulating discussions and arguments, as we both grappled with emerging ideas that had not yet been clearly formulated much less tested in the wider field. In any case, we shared a certain dedication to bringing comparative religion along to its next possibilities.

To be sure, the search for theory is not new. Since the late nineteenth century, many in the field of religion have tried to view its material through the interpretive frames of the human sciences, redescribing the data in terms of applicable philosophies, sociologies, and psychologies, and thus showing ways in which religious life reflects patterned ways that the mind, language, and sociality work. Think: James and Husserl, Durkheim and Weber, Freud and Foucault, structuralism and post-colonialism. For Martin, the resource became cognitive science.

And this has been immensely productive, the more so because Martin is an historian of religion at heart and can not only make the connections of cognitive frames and the historical data of Hellenistic traditions (illustrated in several of the included articles) but also shed new light on many of the otherwise cumbersome but common categories of our field, such as comparison and comparative patterns, kingship and kinship, syncretism, ritual, and historiography. Clearly, his drive is to recapture the notion of a *Religionswissenschaft*—but this time in a post-theological era, the worldview of which is being shaped by the evolutionary sciences. This would bring the "scientific" even beyond its looser nineteenth-century meanings of critical histories and archaeologies, and linguistics to what amounts to a new, species-level, deep history of the human brain and its repertoire of adaptive, dispositional settings. The maxim here would be, "as the mind works, so religion works."

In this endeavor Martin has been able to bring to bear many of the most useful and current concepts in the burgeoning cognitivist tradition. As in the olden days, when anthropologists brought back cultural materials—say, from Africa, Australia, or India—that became influential for reconceiving religion and the general study of religion, I like to think of my colleague as having "gone forth" into another country, in this case, the cognitive sciences, and having brought back resources that should make us all stop and think. In fact, as cofounder in 2006 of the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion, subsequent leadership in that group, several visiting professorships, and new editorial projects, he has helped bring global networking and initiatives to the field.

The prospect of using evolutionary considerations to explain religious behaviors has already generated productive debate both within and outside the field. I think we can expect that "deep history" will become increasingly accepted as the new landscape or worldview within which the study of religion must necessarily find new connections.

William E. Paden

Acknowledgements

This volume reprints selected essays from two decades of my work. It is impossible to thank by name all of my colleagues who have commented on, contributed to, and criticized *in progressum* the essays here collected but I have benefited from all and many. I should, however, like especially to thank two long-time colleagues whose input has been especially important (whether or not they have agreed with the final results). First, is my long-time friend and colleague at the University of Vermont, Professor William E. Paden, who preceded me at the University by two years and whose career developed parallel my own. I have benefited immeasurably from our discussions over the years, beginning already in graduate school. Second, is my long-distance friend and colleague at the University of Toronto, Donald Wiebe. Following upon our earlier discussions, Don has, over the past decade, read virtually everything I have written; his critical comments have always improved my arguments and have saved me from a number of embarrassments. I would like especially to thank Professors Michael Stausberg and Gustavo Benavides for inviting me to contribute to the series they edit for Walter de Gruyter on *Religion and Reason*. I am particularly happy to contribute to this series, which was founded a number of years ago by Professor Jacques Waardenburg whose friendship and mutual collaborations I fondly remember. Finally, I would like to thank my former (undergraduate) student Dr. Steven Hrotic who was my editorial assistant in the preparation of this volume. His general understanding of the work I have done over the years as well as his careful eye for detail has greatly facilitated the preparation of this volume for publication. The editorial preparation of this volume was generously supported by a University of Vermont Retired Faculty Scholar's Award, 2013. And, of course, I must express my appreciation to Dr. Alissa Jones Nelson, my acquisitions editor at De Gruyter and Sabina Dabrowski, my production editor at De Gruyter who have so capably shepherded this volume into print.

With the exception of *Chapter 18* (previously unpublished), the essays in this volume have been reprinted in the form in which they first appeared (with apologies for the repetition of some materials from article to article) with only typos corrected (although it is imprudent to claim that all have been finally identified) and references updated and reformatted. I should like to acknowledge the original place of publication and to thank the respective publishers for their permission to reprint the articles in this volume.

Chapter 1. "The Academic Study of Religion: A Theological or Theoretical Undertaking?" In *Cultures in Contact: Essays in Honor of Professor Gregorios D. Ziakas*,

edited by P. Pachis, P. Vasiliadis, and D. Kaimakis, 333-345. Thessaloniki: Kornelia Sfakianaki Press, 2008.

Chapter 2. "The Academic Study of Religion during the Cold War: The Western Perspective." In *The Study of Religion during the Cold War, East and West*, edited with I. Dolezalová, L.H. Martin and D. Papoušek, 209-223. New York: Peter Lang Press, 2001.

Chapter 3. "Secular Theory and the Academic Study of Religion." In *Secular Theories on Religion. A Selection of Recent Academic Perspectives*, edited by T. Jensen and M. Rothstein, 137-148. Copenhagen: The Museum Tusculanum Press.

Chapter 4. "Of Religious Syncretism, Comparative Religion and Spiritual Quests." In *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion,* edited by A. Geertz and R. McCutcheon, 277-286. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000.

Chapter 5. "To Use 'Syncretism', or Not to Use 'Syncretism': That is the Question." Special issue of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historique* on "Retrofitting Syncretism," edited by William Cassidy, 27 (2001), 389-400.

Chapter 6. "Comparison." *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by W. Braun and R. McCutcheon, 45-56. London: Cassell Academic, 2000.

Chapter 7. "Comparativism and Sociobiological Theory." *Numen* 48 (2001), 290-308.

Chapter 8. "Akin to the Gods or Simply One to Another: Comparison with respect to Religions in Antiquity." In *Vergleichen und Verstehen in der Religionswissenschaft*, edited by H.-J Klimkeit, 147-159. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997.

Chapter 9. "Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities." In *Secrecy and Concealment in Late Antique and Islamic History of Religions*, edited by H. Kippenberg and G. Stroumsa, 101-121. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995,

Chapter 10. "The Anti-Individualistic Ideology of Hellenistic Culture." *Numen* 41 (1994), 117-140.

Chapter 11. "Rationality and Relativism in History of Religions Research." In *Rationality and the Study of Religion*, edited by Jeppe S. Jensen and L. Martin, 145-156. London: Routledge, 2003.

Chapter 12. "Evolution, Cognition and History." In *Past Minds, Studies in Cognitive Historiography*, edited by L. Martin and J. Sørensen, 1-10. London: Equinox, 2011.

Chapter 13. "Can Religion Really Evolve? (And What Is It Anyway?)" In *The Evolution of Religions: Studies, Theories, and Critiques*, edited by J. Bulbulia, R. Sosis, E. Harris, R. Genet, C. Genet and K. Wyman, 349-355. Santa Margarita, CA: The Collins Foundation Press, 2008.

Chapter 14. "Religion and Cognition." In *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, second edition by J. Hinnells, 526-542. London: Routledge 2010.

Chapter 15. "The Promise of Cognitive Science for the Study of Early Christianity." In *Explaining Early Judaism and Christianity: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Sciences*, edited by P. Luomanen, I. Pyysiäinen, and R. Uro, 37-56. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007.

Chapter 16. "Globalization, Syncretism, and Religion in Western Antiquity: Some Neurocognitive Considerations." *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 94.1-2 (2010), 5-17.

Chapter 17. "What Do Religious Rituals Do? (And How Do They Do It?): Cognition and the Study of Religion." In *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith*, edited by R. McCutcheon and W. Braun, 325-339. London: Equinox, 2008.

Chapter 19. "Performativity, Discourse and Cognition: 'Demythologizing' the Roman Cult of Mithras." In *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianity*, edited by W. Braun, 187-217. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005.

Chapter 20. "Cognitive Science, Ritual, and the Hellenistic Mystery Religions." *Religion & Theology* 13 (2006), 383-395.

Chapter 21. "Why Christianity was Accepted by Romans but Not by Rome." In Religionskritik in der Antike, edited by U. Berner and I. Tanaseanu, 93-107. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2009.

Chapter 22. "Aspects of 'Religious Experience' among the Hellenistic Mystery Religions." *Religion & Theology* 12 (2005), 349-369.

Chapter 23. "The Uses (and Abuse) of the Cognitive Sciences for the Study of Religion." *CSSR Bulletin* 37 (2008), 95-98.

Chapter 24. "The Future of the Past: The History of Religions and Cognitive Historiography." *Religio: Revue pro Religionistiku* 20.2 (2012), 255-170.

Abbreviations of classical sources are those of *A Greek English Lexicon*, edited by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott (Oxford University Press) and/or *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition by S. Hornblower, A. Spawnforth and E. Eidinow (Oxford University Press).

LM
Burlington, VT, February 2014

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Introduction: Auto-methodological Reflections

I was extremely fortunate to have begun my teaching career at the University of Vermont, where I remained from 1967 until my retirement in 2010. Given that the support of this university has long facilitated my work, and that my research has been informed by my teaching experiences in an undergraduate department of religion, it is appropriate to begin this collection of my essays by acknowledging this debt.

The University of Vermont, founded in 1791 by Vermont "freethinker" Ira Allen, has played an important role in formally establishing Religion as a secular field of study. From the beginning, "religion" had, of course, always been influential at the university and, in 1912, a course with the title "Religion" was formally introduced in the curriculum.[1] Although a state university, the University of Vermont did not receive public tax support until 1955. At that time, the faculty senate decided that it would no longer be appropriate for the college chaplain or for practicing clergy to offer religion courses in the College of Arts and Sciences, as had been the case, and, consequently, a new "secular" position in the study of religion was approved. The new position was located in the Department of Philosophy and Religion, established in 1946, and reflected the influence of alumnus John Dewey and former president James Marsh, who had introduced English transcendentalism and German higher criticism of the Bible to the United States. In 1963, a separate major in the history of religions was established in that department and, by 1967, when I joined the university, there was a three person contingent of junior religion faculty—including my long-time colleague William Paden—in the Department of Philosophy and Religion. In 1973, the religion faculty separated from the joint department to establish a Department of Religion, one of the first such departments to be created in a United States public university. Against the background of the "liberal" philosophical history of the university and that of contemporary 1970s cultural and political questioning, we began seriously to focus on what it is exactly that constitutes a "secular" study of religion.

1 It is interesting to note that by 1916, this course was entitled the "History and Interpretation of Religion" and included a study of "the psychological nature and conditions of religious experience." Subsequently, E. W. Hopkin's text, the *Origin and Evolution of Religion* (Yale University Press, 1923) was used in this course. I am indebted to William Paden for this information.

The academic study of religion

The only principle that clearly dominated our initial discussions concerning our *de novo* formation of a secular curriculum for the study of religion was that it should not follow the "seminary model," i.e., courses in Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, etc., with one course in "Asian Religions" thrown in for balance (Chapter 1: "The Academic Study of Religion: A Theological or Theoretical Undertaking"), which then was the prevailing curricular model for the study of religion at American private colleges and universities. I subsequently came to appreciate that the study of religion had been—and continues to be—shaped not only by such religious concerns but also by ideological agendas other than the theological, including especially, the political (Chapter 2: "The Academic Study of Religion during the Cold War: The Western Perspective"). What seemed to be required was a "scientific" approach, i.e., a theoretical approach that guards against the human biases and agendas that are inevitable in the study of anything by attempting to arrive at conclusions that are intersubjectively assessable, and which, given the complexities of humanistic inquiry, are at least more or less replicable by other scholars (Chapter 3: "Secular Theory and the Academic Study of Religion"). Our attempts to develop a theoretical framework for the study of religion were supported by our undergraduate teaching, especially the introductory courses that dominated our curricular demands. Whereas graduate education allows for specialized research and teaching, undergraduate education demanded generalizations about religion; theory is but a kind of generalization.

The initial realization of the theoretical approach that we adopted was to emphasize a *comparative* study of religion, which was, after all, the motivation for first establishing an academic study of religion in the late nineteenth-century university. A truly comparative study of religion required that a Christianity-oriented curriculum no longer be the *de facto* norm for understanding the "world religions" but, rather, that this tradition be considered as only one subject among many in a more comprehensive field of study. However, we concluded that a comparative method for the study of religion was not best approached with the so-called "zoo model" by which each of the "world religions" has its own curricular representation (and faculty representative). Even provided no economic restraints, we realized that the diversity of religious traditions prohibited this approach and that our choices as to which traditions to include in this approach would continue to reflect cultural biases. (Which, for example, are the "world religions"? What about historical religions? What about—what was then termed—"primitive religions"?) Consequently, we sought to organize our curriculum around theoretical questions about human religiosity generally, instantiat-

ed, of course, with ethnographic and historical data from various traditions, including the Christian.

Comparison

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the primary "theoretical" model for a comparative study of religions was that of the Chicago "history of religions" school as advanced by Mircea Eliade's ahistorical "phenomenology." Eliade's influence had already shaped the nascent curriculum of religious studies at the University of Vermont, as it had in most departments of religion in North America—as he had influenced my own education. In furtherance of my graduate education in New Testament studies, I had spent a year as a *Gasthörer* at the University of Göttingen, studying primarily with Hans Conzelmann. During this year, however, I sat in on several *religionsgeschichtliche* seminars offered by Docent Carsten Colpe, one of which considered the work of Mircea Eliade. As a result of these seminars, I concluded that *Religionsgeschichte* was a much more interesting and significant field than New Testament studies, which was, after all, already beneficiary of over two millennia of scholars pondering quite a small body of texts. Consequently, I expanded my areas of research to that of Hellenistic religions generally, significantly influenced by Hans Dieter Betz at Claremont Graduate School, where I wrote my PhD thesis under James Robinson on one of the newly discovered Nag Hammadi gnostic texts. Accordingly, by the time I began teaching at the University of Vermont, I presented myself first as scholar of the general history of religions and specifically as a specialist in Hellenistic religions (including Christian origins). I was pleased to find that I was able to fit into the developing curriculum at the university by teaching (at least introductory) courses in both Western and Asian traditions, and, subsequently, a new introductory course on "comparative religion."

Increasingly, I found that Eliade's ahistorical "phenomenology," like that of the other "phenomenologists of religion," to be theoretically wanting for the comparative enterprise. It bore little resemblance, if any, to the philosophical phenomenology with which I was familiar, i.e., to the "scientific" concerns of Edmund Husserl, and, especially, to the existential-phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, which was, at the time, influential in biblical studies (e.g., Rudolf Bultmann). Not only did Eliade neglect any social or historical context for the data he collected, he offered no explanation for that data apart from his crypto-theological claim that they represented manifestations of "the sacred."

Much comparison, I also realized, still involved the comparison of other religions to (some form or aspect of) Christianity, whether explicitly or, as was

more likely the case, implicitly (Chapter 4: "Of Religious Syncretism, Comparative Religion and Spiritual Quests"). And, of course, comparative studies emphasized notions such as "syncretism" as an "explanation" for the effects of religious contact and interaction. Since, however, syncretism is historically descriptive of any human society and its religion, its use is simply a redundancy masquerading as explanation (Chapter 5: "To Use 'Syncretism' or Not to Use 'Syncretism': That is the Question").

I took away from the Chicago model, however, an appreciation for the expanse of human religiosity and the diversity of religious expression, and recognition of a need for a mandate to make sense of the extent of that data. This also meant dealing more directly—more theoretically—with the issue of comparison than simply cataloging religious phenomena. Given human cultural diversity, what was the basis for comparison? What should be identified as the comparables? And who should make that identification (Chapter 6: "Comparison")?

Social scientific theory and Hellenistic religions

My interest in explanation increasingly led me from Eliade's "phenomenographical" cataloguing of "archetypes," observations of recurrent patterns clearly present in religious expressions, to the explanations for their existence in myth and literature offered by C. G. Jung, whose work was somewhat fashionable among religious studies scholars at that time. Whereas Jung did offer an explanation for archetypes, it turned out to be a spurious one. However, before he took his "romanticist-religious turn" into archetypes as manifestations of "numinosity," Jung, like the early Freud, had been caught up in the scientific excitement of late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Europe. It was in this context that Jung initially offered an explanation for archetypes as "psychic instincts," i. e., as modes of psychic functioning or of patterns of behavior shaped by the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens*.

Although the legacy of Jung's work, like that of Freud, is more of a contribution to literature than to science, his early, more scientific explanation for archetypes anticipated my current interest in the cognitive sciences, which are now discovering and mapping precisely those evolved, pan-human behavioral proclivities of ordinary human behavior and cognitive biases that have been exploited by social institutions such as religion, and which actually do offer scientific explanations for the recurring patterns of religious data that had been recognized by earlier phenomenologists of religion. But a cognitive science of religion had not yet been proposed. Consequently, my research during the 1970s and 1980s consisted largely of historical and social-scientific studies of Hellenistic re-

ligious texts and practice—interspersed, I must confess, with a few circumspect attempts to explain such practices from a Jungian perspective (e.g., Martin and Goss 1985) and, then, from that of socio-political construction (Martin, *Religious Transformations and Socio-Political Change*, 1993; Chapter 9: "Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities").

My interest in social construction was motivated by a three-week faculty seminar I helped organize in 1982 with Michel Foucault at the University of Vermont on "technologies of the self" (Martin *et al.* 1988). As with Jung, Foucault anticipated one of the central concerns of the cognitive sciences, in this case, the construction of one's self, but on the basis of environmental power rather than from developmentally early cognitive biases, in interaction, of course, with social input (Chapter 10: "The Anti-Individualistic Ideology of Hellenistic Culture"). It must be noted that Foucault was a much more meticulous historical scholar than is portrayed by the cooptation of his thought by subsequent postmodernists.

Historiography and scientific theorizing

Beginning in the early 1980s, I began seriously to explore some of the natural sciences as a possible theoretical paradigm for a comparative study of religion and for a history of (Hellenistic) religions. The essays in this volume reflect my increasing attention to and subsequent inclusion of these explorations in my historiographical toolbox. Nascent postmodern scholars were, of course, beginning to emphasize the importance of cultural *différence* and to dismiss the possibilities of any meaningful comparative enterprise, as the attempt could only be an exercise in cultural imperialism. At the scientific level, however, research and practice involving pan-human commonality was flourishing in the biological and medical sciences. The year I began teaching, for example, the first heart transplant was performed, and, increasingly, human organs began to be transplanted from persons of one culture to those of quite another, from males to females, between races. I thought that, perhaps, if historians of religion built a theoretical consideration from the bottom up, i.e., from the evolutionary history of human biology, they might then construct an infrastructure of pan-cultural, human behavioral patterns, including those behaviors that are conventionally attributed to religions (Chapter 7: "Comparison and Sociobiological Theory," – the theoretical antecedence of evolutionary psychology). This approach was given significant support with the publication of Donald Brown's *Human Universals* in 1991, though most scholars of religions at the time remained ignorant of Brown's anthropological arguments. But what might the universals of biology,

or even those human universals identified by anthropologists, have to do with the history of religions? Consequently, I began to explore one human universal, specifically, kinship claims and how pan-human claims to kinship, one of the deep historical frames that seemed central to the organization of religious communities and one of the anthropological universals identified by Brown, might support patterns of social organization and ideology among the Hellenistic religious traditions (Chapter 8: "Akin to the Gods or Simply One to Another: Comparison with respect to Religions in Antiquity").

However, I also became increasingly concerned with the issue of historiographical theory and in its "deep historical" evolutionary frame. I had something of a historical sense from my background in historical-critical method in biblical studies and, from that background, had written my *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (1987) in which I had sought to reconcile the historical-critical method with that of the history of religions. Although the historical-critical approach, which is limited primarily to texts, identifies their literary form, the history of their redactions and transmissions, and their context(s), it does not explain why just certain texts are preserved, transmitted and revered (apart, of course, from assumptions about their revelatory significance).

In retrospect, I realize that my broad undergraduate teaching responsibilities at the University of Vermont, together with continuing discussions with my colleagues about a theoretical basis for that teaching and for the formation of a coherent curricular program, were to define the interrelated themes of my research throughout my academic career, namely, what constitutes a plausible, explanatory theory for the study of particular religious data—in my case, the data for specific Hellenistic religions? How exactly is *religious* behaviour distinct from that of other human behaviors? And what is the relationship between scientific theorizing about religion to that in the traditional humanities, especially, to a *history* of religions? In response to these questions, I had decided fairly early in my career that, though mere collections of data without a theoretical framework explained nothing, concerns about theory and method apart from considerations of historical (empirical) data led only to speculations about the identity and nature of religious data. Consequently, I committed to engaging in history of religions research, but a history of religions approach that emphasized empirical historical data and a historiographical approach from a clearly articulated theoretical position. The overlapping inquiries into theory and method and their relationship to analyses of empirical (historical) data, characterize most of the essays collected in this volume and represent that commitment.

Historians generally, even quite good ones, it seemed to me, collected and described data without much theorizing, or, at least, without an explicitly articulated conceptual frame. Rather, they seemed to reflect an approach that contin-

ued that of nineteenth-century historicism, namely, a premise that when all of the data is in—or at least a sufficient amount of data—or when properly situated in its context, their significance will be apparent (Chapter 11: "Rationalism and Relativism in History of Religions Research"). But isn't it the historians' task to explain why just some historical remains are selected as "data" in some contexts in which others might exist as well and/or have been historically possible? And why certain patterns of data exist in some contexts rather than others?

Some "secular" historians had already begun to explore applications of evolutionary theory to explain and correct such historiographical judgments (Chapter 12: "Evolution, Cognition and History"). However, a number of these historians, especially those interested in religion, have moved from the promising position of taking evolutionary theory as a frame for historiographical research into human behaviors, past and present, to an attempt at understanding religion itself as an evolutionary adaptation. This attempt to apply a theory from one domain, biology, to another, history, can only be accomplished by analogy, which, in this case, seems to me to be a very weak one (Chapter 13: "Can Religion Really Evolve? (And What Is It Anyway?)").

Cognition and the study of religion

Three events in 1990 were particularly important for the subsequent direction of my research. The first was my growing involvement in the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). Although I had attended quinquennial congresses of the IAHR since 1975 and several of its regional conferences, by 1990, I had acquired a greater confidence in my participation in the international community of scholars. Secondly, I presented that year, at the XVIth Congress of the IAHR, a paper that challenged some long-held historical assumptions about the Roman cult of Mithraism (Martin 1994), a religion in which I had long harbored a personal interest but which now increasingly provided exemplary data for my theoretical ruminations about the history of religions, especially about the *history* of religions. My challenge to previous assumptions about Mithraism was based on a questioning of historiographical theories that had dominated the study of that cult since antiquity. The third event that transpired in 1990 was the publication of Thomas Lawson's and Robert McCauley's *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture*. This programmatic cognitive theory for explaining religious rituals offered a firm scientific basis for my earlier interests in explanatory theorizing, a scientific program that necessarily included reference to cultural data.

The new field of cognitive science of religion was, most simply, an employment of insights from the burgeoning researches of the evolutionary and cognitive sciences during the latter part of the twentieth century concerning the behavioral and cognitive capacities for and constraints upon those practices and proclivities and by the appropriation and exploitation of these biases by "religious" social institutions, that is, those social institutions which legitimate themselves by claims to the authority of some superhuman agency or other (Chapter 14: "Religion and Cognition"). This new scientific paradigm offered a promising explanatory approach to the study of religion, and for my interest in Hellenistic religions specifically (Chapter 15: "The Promise of Cognitive Science for the Study of Early Christianity;" Chapter 16: "Globalization, Syncretism, and Religion in Western Antiquity: Some Neurocognitive Considerations"). Initial theorizing about religion from this perspective was soon assessed and generally supported by experimental work at new research institutions dedicated specifically to the investigation of religious behaviors and ideas, as well by continuing research in the cognitive sciences generally. It generally offered, and continues to offer, correctives to, as well as confirmations of, previous history of religions research.

But what might *experimental* work in human cognition contribute to the work of historians? The pan-human and deep-historical behavioral and cognitive proclivities of human beings being mapped by cognitive scientists should provide historians with possibilities for explaining not only the historical emergence and dominance of one context over others that were possible given historical constraints but also provide explanations for individual human roles acting in support of and within that particular environmental dominance. Further, cognitive researches into memory and into the spread of mental representations can provide explanations for both historical continuities and discontinuities. However, a consideration of insights from the cognitive sciences for a history of religions, which I have increasingly been doing since the early 1990s, was much easier to recommend than actually to accomplish.

Cognition and ritual

The most obvious *entré* into a cognitive history of religions seemed to be the study of ritual. First of all, two comprehensive and influential cognitive theories of ritual had been published in the 1990s: Lawson's and McCauley's "ritual competence theory," published in 1990 (followed by their "ritual form theory" in 2002); and Harvey Whitehouse's theory of "two [ritually transmitted] modes of religiosity," published in 1995 (and more fully elaborated in 2004) (Chapter 14:

"Religion and Cognition" and Chapter 15: "The Promise of Cognitive Science for the Study of Early Christianity"). Secondly, these theories dealt with an aspect of religion for which empirical data was available—historically as well as in the present—namely, ritual behavior, and ritual behavior was increasingly recognized to be an ordinary kind of human behavior, which is subject to historical as well as experimental research. During the latter part of the twentieth century, evolutionary and cognitive researchers were amassing a great deal of innovative and novel insights into that behavior. Consequently, I became interested in such questions as how do religious rituals differ from ordinary human behavior? What do religious rituals actually accomplish? How might they do so? (Chapter 17: "What Do Religious Rituals Do? (And How Do they Do It?);" Chapter 18: "The Deep History of Religious Rituals"). Also, I sought to address these questions specifically with respect to rituals associated with my historical field of interest, Hellenistic religions, focusing increasingly on the rituals performed within the Hellenistic mystery cults and the early Christianities, especially on their rites of initiation (Chapter 19: "Performativity, Narrative, and Cognition: 'Demythologizing' the Roman Cult of Mithras;" Chapter 20: "Cognitive Science, Ritual, and the Hellenistic Mystery Religions;" Chapter 21: "Why Christianity Was Accepted by Romans But Not by Rome"). This emphasis on ritual also suggested how religious traditions might employ their rites as strategies for the creation and propagation of religious experiences (Chapter 22: "Aspects of 'Religious Experience' among the Hellenistic Mystery Religions").

Conclusions

I was trained as a humanist, not as a scientist. Nevertheless, I welcomed the cognitive sciences as a paradigm for a scientific approach to the history of religions. Consequently, my studies in the history of Hellenistic religions that attempt to employ insights from the cognitive sciences should be taken as themselves experimental, as explorations into the possibilities that a scientific paradigm might offer for the study of religion. If conclusions suggested by these "experiments" are considered to be questionable by historians of religions, then the assumptions of their experimental design should be reconsidered. If, however, other researchers consider some of my conclusions to be even suggestive of further research and correction, then I believe my goals as a "scientist" have been achieved.

While I have emphasized that the cognitive sciences seem, at the present, to be the most promising paradigm available for a credible scientific study of religion, I have never excluded the possibility that alternative scientific paradigms

might contribute to that study; indeed, I have welcomed research into human decision making by behavioral economists as well as by the network theorizing that is part of chaos theory (Martin 2013 and 2014). I have, however, argued that the proper relationship of science to religion is that the former comprises the domain of theory and methodological approach while the latter is only that of the data to be explained. I have, consequently, cautioned about attempts to use cognitive science of religion by theologians for their apologetic purposes, even as theologians have attempted to employ advances in secular knowledge throughout their history (Chapter 23: "The Uses (and Abuse) of the Cognitive Sciences for the Study of Religion").

I never suggested that evolutionary theorizing and a cognitive science of religion can exhaust our understanding of religious behaviors, especially our understanding of the history of religions. Rather, I have argued that the insights from the cognitive sciences might provide a valuable addition to the toolbox of traditional historiographical methods and that these tools are—even must be—complementary. The experimental aspirations of cognitive scientists to identify pan-human behaviors and mental proclivities can identify variables that motivate human behavior which historians might otherwise have overlooked. They can model historiographical conclusions and assess those theoretical models experimentally and through computer modeling. They can also identify behavioral and cognitive constraints upon human behaviors and representations. They can, thereby, confirm or challenge historiographical conclusions. On the other hand, if evolutionary theorists or cognitive scientists identify a particular pan-human behavior or specific mental proclivity which cannot be confirmed and tracked by historians throughout the "real-life" data for human behaviors that they control, then it is, perhaps, the assumptions that inform their scientific research which must be reexamined. Chapter 24: "The Future of the Past: The History of Religions and Cognitive Historiography," is composed almost entirely of passages taken from previous chapters and offers, thereby, a synthetic conclusion to the deep historical and secular theoretical positions I have argued throughout this volume.

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1. The Academic Study of Religion: A Theological or Theoretical Undertaking?

> One must follow (the universal Law [λόγος], namely) that which is common (to all). But although the Law is universal, the majority live as if they had understanding peculiar to themselves.
>
> –Heraclitus[2]

In this article, I should like briefly to argue in favor of an *academic* study of religion that is separate from the work of theology—despite the continuing presence of the latter within the halls of academia. The difference for which I argue should in no way be taken as questioning the probity of theologians in pursuit of their religious ends; theologizing traditionally has been, and remains a central activity of Western religious practice. Rather my question has to do with the appropriateness of such religious practices in the context of the modern research university.

i

"Knowledge" of our world and of ourselves is not an accumulated corpus of self-evidently "given" facts and information (Poovey 1998) but is a construction of what is held, in any historical domain, to be the "truth of the world." This historically contingent view of knowledge does not mean there is no "real" world "out there" to know but is a recognition of fundamental physiological and psychological constraints on human representations of their environments, both material and historical, and an acknowledgement of the diversity of those inhabited domains to be known. What is taken to be knowledge by various societies, what they include in—and exclude from—their "circle of knowledge" cannot, therefore, finally be determined in terms of subjective references to objective forms but is constituted, rather, out of the cognitive capacities for and constraints upon possible representations of respective times and places (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 1–13; Foucault 1973, xxii). These historically specific possibilities of thought organize what is considered to be knowable in a given age and make up its "encyclopedia" (Pliny *HN praef*. 14).

By the fifth-century, Western culture was for all practical purposes Christian, its encyclopedia organized theologically. Theology ruled the new universities as

2 *Fr.* 2 (trans. Freeman 1948, 24–25)

"queen of the sciences."[3] The priority initially accorded the theological curriculum at the University of Paris (Taylor 1951, ii: 146; Gilson 1955, 246; Cobban 1975, 12) was endorsed by Gregory IX at the beginning of the thirteenth century (1228) (Haskins 1988 [1927], 364) and a comprehensive system of knowledge in which all branches of learning were relegated to the status of "handmaidens" in service to sacred doctrine became established by Thomas Aquinas at the end of that century (*ST* 1.Q.1.5.). The entire corpus of human knowledge was, in other words, organized by and around the category of "God" (Taylor 1951, ii: Ch. 36). In the words of Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1140 – 1200), "all the natural arts serve Divine Science, and the lower knowledge *rightly ordered* leads to the higher" (*De sacramentis: Prologus*; cited by Taylor 1951, ii. 2: 93, emphasis added; see also ii. 318 – 319). Theology, in other words, speculatively argued on the basis of biblical authority and exposition (Gilson 1955, 308), was understood to be not only the culmination of all the sciences but also to be that science in terms of which all knowledge was organized.

Beginning in the fourteenth century, an alternative organization of knowledge began to emerge in Western culture. In contrast to the traditional theologies, this new Renaissance encyclopedia was organized around the principle of "man." Already in the first half of the fifteenth century, Leonardo Bruni, an early follower of Petrarch, wrote that it is "the humanities (*studia humanitatis*) [that] perfect and adorn a human being (*homo*) (Bruni 1947, 7 – 8, trans. cited from Proctor 1988, 3). And by the sixteenth century, John Calvin could acknowledge "two branches of knowledge," "the knowledge of God" and "the knowledge of ourselves." And while he acknowledged that "these two branches of knowledge are…-intimately connected, which of them precedes and produces the other," he confessed, "is not easy to discover" (*Instit*. I.1). With the "European legal revolution" in the twelfth century, universities began to be chartered as "corporations," legal entities in which the pursuit of knowledge was emancipated from the previous control of political and ecclesiastical domination (Huff 1993, 119 – 148). As the English

3 The phrase itself seems to derive from the *desideratum* of Martin Luther that: "*Die Theologia soll Kaiserin sein, die Philosophia und andere gute Künste sollen derselben Dienerin sein …*" (Luther 1919, V, 616 [#6351]). Despite Luther's repudiation of scholasticism *(Contra scholasticam theologian*, 1517; Grane, 1967), however, this phrase has generally come to be used in reference to the scholastic synthesis of faith and reason by Thomas Aquinas. In his encyclical "*Aeterni Patris*" (1879) Leo XIII proclaimed "the benefits to be derived from "a practical reform of philosophy by restoring the renowned teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas." This restoration was "for the defence and beauty of the Catholic Faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences" (Kennedy 1913). In 1909, Alfred Mortimer, referred to Thomas' *Summa* as the "simplest and most perfect sketch of universal theology," which, Mortimer averred, was "the Queen of the Sciences" (Mortimer 1898, II, 454, 465).

clergyman and novelist Charles Kingsley averred, "Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy" (Kingsley 1864, 217).

Increasingly, the "humanities" began to be used in intellectual and academic circles as a designation, in contrast to the medieval domination of the theologies, for this new secular learning (*OED: vide* "humanity").[4] Characterized by scientific methods of observation and experiment, humanistic organizations of knowledge gradually replaced the theological in Western universities (Taylor 1951, 2: 418). If, prior to the Renaissance, an ecclesiastically sanctioned theology provided the all-encompassing system of knowledge within which secular learning found its proper place, the human sphere now became an autonomous system of knowledge within which the religious had to adapt (Casanova 1994, 15). Nevertheless, a "residue" of the medieval world survived into this Renaissance reorganization of knowledge.

Parallel to the emergence of a secular or humanistically organized knowledge in the fifteenth century, witchcraft trials began to be held throughout Europe. According to the remarkably uniform testimonies and confessions presented to these trials:

> male and female witches met at night, generally in solitary places, in fields or on mountains. Sometimes, having anointed their bodies, they flew, arriving astride poles or broom sticks; sometimes they arrived on the backs of animals, or transformed into animals themselves. Those who came for the first time had to renounce the Christian faith, desecrate the sacrament and offer homage to the devil, who was present in human or (most often) animal or semi-animal form. There would follow banquets, dancing, sexual orgies. Before returning home the female and male witches received evil ointments made from children's fat and other ingredients (Ginzburg 1991, 1).

For those still operating with the earlier theological encyclopedia, adherents to humanistic or secular principles of knowledge could only be understood as witches, as satanic renouncers of the Christian faith. Their conservative theological goal may be characterized as a commitment to preserving the autonomy of "the invisible," of the "systematic exteriority" of "spiritual animating forces," exemplified as much by the witches in their solitary night places as by the Christian deity over against which these spiritual forces were defined. In the epistemic organization of the modern world, however, the scientific goal of knowledge is to bring that once held to be invisible into the light of explanatory possibility for the world of human subjects (Gauchet 1997, 102–103, 145).

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4 · This usage was derived from its classical sense as "mental cultivation befitting a man" or "liberal education" (e. g., Aulus Gellius, *Gell.* 13.16; Cicero, *de Or.* 1.60.256; 2.17.72; 2.37.154; *Rep.* 1.17; *Verr.* 2.4.44 §98).

Whereas witches and their kin may have disappeared from the *explanantia* of modern academic discourse, the gods have lingered on. Among contributions originally presented to a "Resurrection Summit" in 1996, for example, William P. Alston, Stephen T. Davis and Richard Swinburne, three philosophers teaching at "secular" universities, presented arguments in support of the bodily resurrection of Jesus (Davis *et al*. 1997). Alston and Davis, seemingly unimpressed with views generally expressed by biblical scholars to the contrary, based their arguments on their dubious assumptions about the historical reliability of the New Testament Gospel accounts of the event (Alston 1997; David 1997). Taking a more metaphysical approach, Swinburne postulated that if one includes God in the evidence, "the historical evidence is quite strong enough" to conclude that Jesus actually rose from the grave since, if God exists, the laws of nature depend on him and, consequently, can be suspended by him (Swinburne 1997, 202, 204–5, 207). The cogency of all three of these arguments are contingent upon Swinburne's conditional conjunction: *if* God exists, then, of course, God may be included in the evidence and if one includes God in the evidence, then the Gospel accounts might be accepted as an inspired record of historical probability. But the presumption concerning the existence of God is precisely the point of epistemological contention. No matter how logically argued, no matter how numerous the citations and references adduced, such scholarly accoutrements nevertheless remain in service to an *a priori* and non-falsifiable confession of faith about the existence of (a Christian) God, an epistemological positioning of the secular "sciences" as the handmaidens of theology that was characteristic of thirteenth-century thought.

Expedited by the world exploration that was associated with European Renaissance, the rapidly expanding circle of humanistic knowledge increasingly encountered new cultures, each with their own histories, their own "circles of knowledge" and their own sets of religious practices and teachings. In this newly comparative context, the "theologies" of the various cultures, both Christian and non-Christian became properly understood as the discursive practices of specific religious traditions. To "speak" or "think" about god or the gods (*θεός[οἱ] λέγειν*) requires some sort of particularistic assumption or confession about the existence of the god or gods that one speaks or thinks about. It is this *a priori* confessional and its in principle non-falsifiable assumption about "the invisible" that characterizes theologizing as a discursive *practice* of the specific religions. Since none of such claims are, however, falsifiable, they all have an equal ontological claim to truth. It was no longer possible to argue convincingly that any one of these theologies, whatever their respective claims to universality, might provide a general basis for human knowledge, as had been argued by thirteenth-century Christian theologians (e. g. Thomas, *ST* 1.Q.1.2)—and is still argued by, for example, some "fundamentalists" of various faiths. Rather, it is

the modern sciences, both natural and human, that are producing a truly cross-cultural language (Wilson 1998, 49), whereas the theologies have been resettled into the appropriate domains of their respective religious traditions. If, however, a study of religion be situated in the humanistic (scientific) organization of knowledge rather than in the more specialized theological pursuit of knowledge, then the possibility of an "academic study of religion" (*θρησκειολογία*, *Religionswissenschaft*) becomes as valid as does a study of anything. Such an *academic* study of religion might well concern itself with how various peoples in differing times and places have conceived and spoken about their god or gods and why they do so in the ways they do. The corpus of the various theological claims and practices constitutes, in other words, data to be explained by academic study and this means that it must proceed, as does the study of anything, from a position of theoretical competence (Penner and Yonan 1972, 133).

ii

To argue that an academic study of religion must proceed on the basis of theoretical competence rather than theological confession is not to argue for any singular theory of religion. It is to argue, however, that thinking about religion, as with any academic study, should inhabit a theoretical domain. The epistemological domain of theory is that of generalization. In academic study, the term "religion"—a Latin based word which has no precise equivalent in many other languages—has no objective, ontological or metaphysical referent but is a scholarly generalization about certain human claims and behaviors that seeks to inscribe and explain the greatest amount of data in terms of the fewest number of principles. The problem is how to differentiate between valid and invalid generalizations.

Generalizations about "religion," like those about any set of human data, may be produced from one of three orientations: common sense, ideology and theory. "Common sense" may be defined, with Giambattista Vico, as "judgement without reflection, shared" by a particular social group (Vico 1970 [1744] ¶142). Such commonsense generalizations, whether valid or invalid, are uncritically transmitted by the group for which they remain common until they become somehow discredited. Ideological generalizations, by contrast, are based on the resolute commitments of groups to their own propagation and reflect, therefore, their own special interests (Merton 1968, 160, 563). If successful, consequently, propagandistic generalizations, such as those by a "new" religion, may themselves achieve the status of cultural common sense—as is instantiated by the history of Christianity. Theories, on the other hand, are generalizations that are explicitly formulated as hypotheses which might be subject to critical assessment in light of some sort of intersubjecti-

velly educed evidence. On the basis of such evidence, valid generalizations might be differentiated from those judged to be invalid. To be epistemologically useful, however, generalizations not only must inscribe and explain a "congenial" set of data but must also differentiate these data from those judged to be discordant. If, in other words, generalizations about religion include, in principle, *everything*, then nothing has been gained in making that generalization.

Hypotheses about religions have been theoretically formulated on the basis of and tested against data produced by historical and anthropological (comparative) research. And explanations for these religious data have been offered by various sociological, including political and economic, theorists, especially those working in the traditions of Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Apart from perpetuating a "cult of these theoretical ancestors" (Stark 1997, 21), however, little theoretical advance in the study of religion has been made since the nineteenth century. The two exceptions to this dearth of theoretical work in the academic study of religion are rational choice theory (e. g., Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Young 1997) and cognitive theories (e. g., Boyer 2001, McCauley and Lawson 2002; Whitehouse 2004).

While there are intriguing relationships between rational choice and cognitive theorizing (e. g., Stark 1997, 7; Martin 2004, 119), this article is not the place to evaluate these theories of religion. I would, however, like to suggest one generalization about religion which I believe might provide a framework within which both theories might productively operate and speak to it briefly, namely that: *religion is a social system identical to all other social systems within a particular domain, with the sole exception that its members seeks legitimation for their group by making claim to the authority of superhuman power.*

The hypothesis about religion as a social system is based on the conclusions of a diverse group of scholars—anthropologists, biologists, cognitive psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, etc.—that human beings are a social species. Consequently, all human phenomena, including religions, are fundamentally social. Asocial human phenomena are considered pathological, e. g., hermits who live apart from some sort of socially legitimated practice such as religiously sanctioned ascetic practices or those of meditation.

Since the relationships that constitute any social unit may be understood as relationships of power (Foucault 1980, 119), we may broadly differentiate between two "ideal types" of social organization on the basis of differing distributions of power: small-scale, face-to-face social organizations in which power is distributed, in principle at least, more or less equitably throughout the social unit and large-scale social organizations in which power has become consolidated in one person or in a single class of the social unit. Typically, the distribution of power among the various systems operating within a particular type of society, e. g., relations of production and exchange (economics), of the instruments and/or instruments of govern-

mentality (politics), of the accepted systems of ideas (philosophy), of the rules of social relationships (ethics, law), etc., will be redundant and reinforcing.

We may term those social systems "religious" that legitimates themselves, their constitutive boundaries and the rules of their constitutive relationships by claims to the authority of *superhuman* power. Such "religious" systems may be autonomous or they may be undifferentiated from or embedded within other systems constitutive of a common social unit, e. g., the political, with the reciprocal consequence that the latter will benefit from the legitimizing claims to superhuman authority of the former and the former will benefit from the materially based power of the latter. This does not preclude, however, conflict arising between differentially legitimated systems, between the political and the religious systems, for example, in which the political system might be legitimated by force and the religious by its advocacy of a contrary set of ideals, or even between two religious systems which claim legitimation from antithetical interpretations of superhuman power even though both occupy a common cultural domain.

Claims to superhuman power may be imagined as extending to supernatural power but not necessarily so. The Olympian deities of ancient Greece were, for example, not imagined as supernatural but simply as superhuman; whereas they represented power beyond that allotted mortals, they were nevertheless situated within the cosmic bounds and were subject to Fate, the Greek functional equivalent to the modern notion of natural law. In other words, all representations of supernatural power are superhuman but not all representations of superhuman power are supernatural. Superhuman/supernatural powers are most often imagined anthropomorphically, as intentional agents who can effect some desired transformation in the given order of things and with whom social relations can be established.

Since any social system refers to bounded or closed sets of interdependent elements in which the value or significance of each element results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others (after Saussure 1959, 114), those practices, both discursive and non-discursive, for which legitimation is claimed on the basis of superhuman power can be neither studied nor compared in isolation from apparently similar practices from other systemic contexts but must be studied in their relationship to all other elements that constitute a particular bounded social unit as well as in relationship to all other systems constitutive of that social unit. It is the redundant implications of these data that constitutes the study of religion as interdisciplinary and not the claims made by some for a polymethodological approach, which obscures any stipulated focus upon the generalization "religion" as a theoretical object of academic inquiry.

iii

The ancient Greeks had conceived of an inherent orderliness that governed the cosmos and its inhabitants (λόγος, e. g., Heraclit. *fr.* 30); the Semitic world, by contrast, imagined a world in which cosmic order needed to be created (Gen. 1–3). The Christian West attempted a synthesis of these two views from their constituent histories by attempting to articulate the order of a created world in terms of the categories of cosmic order proposed by the Greeks, by Plato (Augustine) and then by Aristotle (Thomas Aquinas). Such a project of natural theology could only culminate in claims to a (revealed) knowledge of the creating deity. When the Renaissance dilation of Western thought revealed that the Western "science" of theology was culturally contingent and not, therefore, an adequate basis for a shared human knowledge, the Greek vision of an intrinsic order of things reemerged in Enlightenment assumptions about a world of nature universally governed by discernible laws. This universalistic revival was challenged, in turn, by Romanticism's emphasis on the individual interiority of "truth" and, subsequently, by the twentieth-century's epistemological specializations. The consequent fragmentation of knowledge became the occasion for theologians once again to claim to provide some integrated basis for the organization of knowledge. This basis has been sought either in attempts at inter-religious dialogue among the dominant religious traditions or in a generic "spiritualization" of diverse religious claims themselves.

As we enter the twenty-first century, human knowledge is once again converging upon consilience, a congruency of causal explanation among the various branches of knowledge, organized not around any religious principle or around questionable notions of human rationality but by the conclusions of natural sciences (Wilson 1998, 8–13). If "religion" is the social expressions of significant human universals that it seems to be, then the time is long overdue for an academic study of its claims and practices finally to be disentangled from those theological "understandings[s] peculiar to themselves" (Heraclit. *fr.* 2) and be joined finally with the other persuits of the human sciences in a serious explanation of yet unexplored domains of human behavior and of the significance of that behavior for the world we inhabit (Martin 1997).

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2. The Academic Study of Religions during the Cold War: A Western Perspective

I resist, in the following, the pretension implied in representing the "western" perspective on the academic study of religion during the Cold War. At best, I can attempt to report on the situation in the United States, and then, but partially; but perhaps the American case will represent, if *in extremis*, something of the "western" perspective. My report will be based in part on anecdotal evidence and impressionistic views as well as on some of the growing body of research that is emerging to document the relationship between the Cold War and the university (cited herein and in Schrecker 1986, 4, n. 3). I hope, nevertheless, that these reflections might suffice to initiate discussion and analysis of issues raised by the complexities of this recent period of our shared history for our common pursuits of an academic study of religion.

Introduction

From 1945, with the conclusion of World War II, until 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, much of the world was in the grips of what has been termed "the Cold War," a forty-year period of ideological, political and economic conflict between the "West" and the "East" which, on occasion, threatened to become a "Hot War." The communist coup in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin blockade in 1948 and the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb and the establishment of a communist government in China the following year consolidated an anti-communist sentiment that had been growing in the United States since the 1920s and 1930s into a reaction that, at times, reached the level of mass hysteria. The wildly improbable assertions associated with this anti-communist frenzy is illustrated, for example, by a booklet prepared by the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee in 1948 entitled *100 Things You Should Know about Communism in the U.S.A*, in which figures supplied by director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, allege that in 1947 "one in every 1,814 Americans was a communist, a higher ratio than the one in every 2,277 Russians who were Bolsheviks in 1917" (Lewis 1988, 10). Such fosterings of Cold War hysteria and the reactionary McCarthyism it produced in the 1950s had, however, as much to do with domestic politics as it had to do with any real or imagined threat to the West from the so-called Red Menace, at least for its political "managers" (Schrecker 1986, 4–9).

The Cold War and the University

American universities were not detached from the Cold War culture or immune from its rhetoric but came to play a central role in its repressive practice (Lewis 1988, 2, 268; Neusner and Neusner 1995, 26). "By now," the historian Christopher Simpson has observed:

> it is clear that military, intelligence, and propaganda agencies provided by far the largest part of the funds for large research projects in the social sciences in the United States from World War II until well into the 1960s, and that such funding was designed to support the full range of national security projects of the day...The favored scholars most active in these affairs frequently formed tight, self-reinforcing networks...that came to have great influence over scholarly societies, foundation grants committees, tenure decisions, the contents of academic journals, and other levers of power in the academy (Simpson 1998, xii).

"[T]he tight, dynamic linkages among the academy's prevailing ideological framework, its choice of research method, and its research results have," Simpson argued, "had much more in common in East and West than either side generally has been willing to admit" (Simpson 1998, xxviii). Simpson even concluded that "[t]he interweaving of social scientists with the national security apparatus was...as pervasive and suffocating in the [United States as in the USSR]" (Simpson 1998, xii). This influence of Cold War ideology on American universities challenged the very foundation of academic freedom and of the academy itself.

The effects of the Cold War and the rabid anti-communism it generated in the United States reached even into the bucolic remove of my own university. In 1953, a nationally recognized research scholar at the University of Vermont was subpoenaed to testify before the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee concerning his alleged communist activities. Although he denied that he was a communist, when he was questioned about his activities and associations prior to coming to Vermont, he invoked, as a matter of principle, the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States which guarantees any citizen protection against self-incrimination. As a consequence, he was dismissed from his tenured professorship by the Board of Trustees of the university (Holmes 1991). Again in 1971, the Board of Trustees of the University of Vermont, overturning the endorsement of his department, of his dean and of the president of the university, denied the reappointment of a professor of Political Science because of his outspoken and public opposition to United States involvement in Vietnam. Although exact figures are unavailable, the estimate of university faculty in the United States who were dismissed during the Cold War period for political reasons or

whose positions were not renewed numbers in the hundreds (Schrecker 1986, 10, 241; Lewis 1988, 38, 274).

The Morrill Land Grant College Act, passed in 1862 in the midst of the American Civil War, had established the University of Vermont, like most public universities in the United States as, in principle, an instrumentality of the state (Lewontin 1997, 12–17). "The extraordinary facility with which the academic establishment accommodated itself to the demands of the state" during the Cold War fully instantiated this principle (Schrecker 1986, 340).

Prior to World War II, "[a]utonomy from the federal government was, in fact, central to the definition of the university as well as of the science and scholarship conducted within it...[as was] autonomy from private industry and, more broadly, the world of commerce" (Lowen 1997, 2). Following World War II, however, the United States, heretofore characterized more by isolationism than by internationalism, found itself rather suddenly in a position of world power which brought it into contact with cultures vastly different from its own. In response, the nation turned to the universities for guidance (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 79), and the universities responded by creating area studies.

Towards the end of World War II, the Committee on World Regions of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) first recommended the establishment of area studies. This SSRC report seriously questioned "whether we can spare the energies of accomplished and potential scholars for regional study," especially since "some of the most fruitful results have been obtained through the comparative method" (cited by Wallerstein 1997, 196). Yet "area studies" rapidly became an established component of the university curriculum to the detriment of earlier concerns with comparison and provided the foundation for the incommensurate "culture studies" that came to dominate academia during the post-Cold War period. The areas defined for study included, first of all, the Far East, focusing initially on Japan as "a success story of development" during the U.S. occupation of that country following World War II but quickly shifting to include China as "a pathological example of abortive development" following its "loss" to communism in 1949 (Cumings 1998, 160), and soon including communist Russia and eastern Europe as well. Second, area studies focused on "tribal" or "primitive" peoples, first in Latin America with later shifts to the Middle East and to Africa where the Soviet Union had political advantage (Wallerstein 1997, 198). These studies of non-western systems were driven by the desire "to understand the functioning of those that already had communist regimes and to help prevent other areas from 'falling into the hands of the communists'" (Wallerstein 1997, 200–201).

"During the cold war," consequentiy, "the nation's leading universities moved from the periphery to the center of the nation's political economy"

(Lowen 1997, 2; Schrecker 1986, 359). This transformation in the role of the academy contributed to an "unprecedented and explosive expansion" during the 1960s that was fueled by the post-war "baby-boom" demand, on the one hand, and the infusion of public funding that followed upon the successful 1957 launch of Sputnik, on the other. In addition to area studies, universities now reemphasized mathematics and the natural sciences as well as making room for such new fields of study as nuclear engineering, all of which bore obvious relevance to the nation's geopolitical concerns. "Traditional social science disciplines also shifted their emphasis, stressing quantitative approaches over normative ones and individual behavior and cultural studies over sociological ones" (Lowen 1997, 3). The humanities benefited as well, as "[a]dministrations tried to keep some balance among the components of the curriculum, strengthening the humanities along with the more favored social sciences and the most favored natural sciences, mathematics and engineering" (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 86): "lower teaching loads in science...meant lower teaching loads in the humanities...Higher salaries for biologists...meant higher salaries for biographers" (Lewontin 1997, 30).

As universities opened their doors to new subjects, there was also a renewed interest in the academic study of religion (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 79). Following the Schempp-Murray decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1963, which rejected religious practice in the public schools but encouraged the "study of comparative religion or the history of religion" that the court judged to be "inseparable" from "the history of man," an academic study of religion was readily accepted in virtually all American public universities. By 1973, religion was recognized along with anthropology, economics, political science and sociology in a report of the SSRC on the spectacular growth of area studies, especially those in a non-western context (Wallerstein 1997, 209 – 210). And, as with area studies generally, "the two principal documentary sources for...[this new] history of religions have been, and still are," in the conclusion of Mircea Eliade, "the cultures of Asia and the peoples whom one calls...'primitive'" (Eliade 1969, 57).

The Cold War and the Academic Study of Religion

Whereas the impact of the Cold War on universities and on the reciprocal roles they played is increasingly well documented, its influence on the academic study of religion in western universities, the choice of theories and methods employed, and on the shaping of the subject matter pursued in this study during this period and after has received only passing notice, and that, to my knowledge, by but two scholars, Jacob Neusner (Neusner and Neusner 1995) and Russell McCutch-

eon (1997). Yet any academic study reflects larger issues surrounding the production of knowledge generally. In allusion to this influence, McCutcheon has recently suggested that the dominant direction of the academic study of religion in the United States, as it was defined during the late 1960s and early 1970s, had much in common with "the long-recognized associations between nineteenth-century colonial efforts to control distant lands and peoples (especially the Cold War concern with the rise of 'Asia'), on the one hand, and early intellectualist efforts to understand the primitives as forerunners of Europeans (of which *Religionswissenschaft* played a significant role), on the other" (McCutcheon 1997, 163). As Simpson has observed:

> Few...today would argue with the proposition that the ideology...of, say, twelfth-century Confucianism or nineteenth-century British imperialism profoundly shaped the methods used by intellectuals of those epochs to view events, and determined much of what they took to be literally and certainly true about the world around them (Simpson 1998, xi).

As Jacob Neusner has correctly observed, the academic study of religion in the United States was "reinvented" in the midst of Cold War rhetoric and ideology (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 23; also Smart 1990, 299–300). This reinvented study, exemplified by the work of Eliade and the so-called "Chicago School," has proved to be as hegemonic for the academic study of religion in the West as did "scientific atheism" in the East.

Although the practice of religion was discouraged in most areas of the former Soviet Union, and outlawed in some, an academic study of religion nevertheless persisted, oftimes in the context of "Institutes of Scientific Atheism." The very name of such Institutes indicated a Marxist ideological agenda and the subject matter pursued in these as well as in other contexts was often in support of state goals, e. g., the study of Islam which might contribute to the administration of Islamic areas in the Soviet domain.

Unlike the situation in the Soviet Union, it was the *practice* of religion, including its discursive practice as theology, that flourished in the United States after World War II while its academic study was, if not discouraged, certainly neglected. As Neusner notes, the study of religion in the United States "centered (where it flourished at all) on the truth or falsity of religious beliefs, on the one side, and the description by native believers of their personal beliefs, on the other." After its "reinvention" in the 1960s and 1970s, this study "began to ask the questions of social description and cultural analysis that now preoccupied the country" (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 32). "[S]ince religion," Neusner continues:

> defined the social order for many countries and life's purpose for much of humanity, the time had come to support the study of religion, for analytical purposes and not as a medium of indoctrination, within the curriculum (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 35).

But in his idealization of the Cold War university and of the development of an academic study of religion during this period, Neusner neglects to consider the way in which religion has historically defined the social order of the United States, from the theocratic pretensions of the Puritan colonists to those of contemporary right-wing Christian movements, from the deistic aspirations for the new republic by Thomas Jefferson to the social engineering advanced by Walter Rauschenbusch and the social gospel tradition generally. The centrality of religion to American society—or at least the American obsession to be religious about religion (Herberg 1960, 84)—was nowhere more evident than during the Cold War period in which the academic study of religion in the United States was "reinvented."

When, for example, the historian and, subsequently, Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953, he allowed that:

> he had briefly been a Communist Party member in the late 1930s, but now said that no communist should be allowed to teach in an American university...[A]sked by the committee to show how he had expressed his opposition to Communism, [Boorstin] said: "First, in the form of an affirmative participation in religious activities, because I think religion is a bulwark against Communism."

Only secondarily did Boorstin consider his attempt to discover "the unique virtues of American democracy" and to explain these to his students in teaching and writing, an appropriate expression of opposition to communism (Zinn 1997, 42).

In contrast to Boorstin's celebration of American political uniqueness, Reinhold Niebuhr, in his *The Irony of American History* published the year before Boorstin's testimony (Niebuhr 1952), emphasized, in the words of his biographer, the "interrelatedness of American and European, liberal and Marxist dogmas" (Fox 1985, 244). And yet, this more nuanced analysis of the Cold War conflict was based in Niebuhr's own religious renunciation of communism as a "demonic politico-religious movement" (Niebuhr 1955, 12).

The implication of both Boorstin's and Niebuhr's position is not only that democracy itself may be understood as a religion but that this "democracy as religion" is the true "religion of religions" (Herberg 1960, 88). For the United States, in other words, Cold War ideology was less an imposition by the state than it was a matter of the state being defined by a historically constructed, religiously

based, ideology. Charges of "atheism," consequently, while not based on the abeyance of religious belief *per se* (Lewis 1988, 37), nevertheless constituted for many a sufficient basis to associate one with communism and with the legal sanctions such association carried (Lewis 1988, 113), whereas testimony concerning one's religious conviction was considered a sound defense against such charges (Lewis 1988, 236).

I know of no instance where the academic study of religion in American public universities was overtly exploited or directly funded by governmental agencies in opposition to the oxymoronically formulated threat of an "atheistic communism" or in support of Cold War strategies, as have been documented, for example, in the fields of anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, various of the physical sciences, etc. Though it may have come close. For example, the policy-making committee of World University Service (WSU) of the United States, a church-related federation of campus and service organizations issued a resolution on March 8, 1967 that expressed outrage at the Central Intelligence Agency and at other "individuals, foundations and organizations" that had, according to the resolution, established a "network of conspiracy within seemingly free institutions." Further, that resolution called for a special WSU panel to investigate published reports that the organization's executive director, John Simons, and its chairman, Huston Smith, were "possibility guilty of complicity in acts which the committee thoroughly deplores." At the same time, the resolution recognized that both Simon and Smith "categorically denied any knowledge of CIA involvement in the organization" (*New York Times*, March 9, 1967, 10, 1–2). However, Smith's views on the utility of "world understanding" were clearly expressed a decade earlier in his book *The Religions of Man* (1958), widely used since that time especially in university classes on comparative religion. Early in this volume, he recounts the time when he was:

> taxied by bomber to the Air Command and Staff College at the Maxwell Air Force Base outside Montgomery, Alabama, to lecture to a thousand selected officers on the religions of other peoples. I have never had students more eager to learn. What was their motivation? Individually I am sure it went beyond this in many cases, but as a unit they were dealing with the peoples they were studying as allies, antagonists, or subjects of military occupation. Under such circumstances it would be crucial for them to predict their behavior, conquer them if worse came to worse, and control them during the aftermath of reconstruction (Smith 1958, 8; on this passage see also McCutcheon 1997, 179–180).

On the other hand, as McCutcheon reminds us, "the connections between the normalization and the domination of a populace and its depiction by scholarly writers" are not always so direct (McCutcheon 1997, 187). The Russian historian and philosopher of science Slava Gerovitch has pointed out that:

> academic discourse [need not necessarily be] a container of a particular ideology or theory, but rather [may be] a mechanism for advancing a certain agenda via disciplinary knowledge. Many ideological beliefs and theoretical concepts can be viewed as the result of conscious attempts to explicate and rationalize discursive norms, in much the same way that grammatical rules are evoked to describe and prescribe linguistic practices. Instead of depicting the Gold War solely as a clash of ideologies, it may be more productive to examine the discursive strategies that were employed to shape the image of the opponent and to build up "our" ideology against "theirs" (Gerovitch 1998, 218).

As Neusner noted, the reinvented field of the academic study of religion:

> adopted as its generative problem how to learn to understand and appreciate the other at the point at which the other was most particular and most bizarre to us, which is, in the rites and myths of the supernatural—and in the social and political order flowing therefrom (Neusner and Neusner 1995, 23).

Like the literary criticism with which Eliade compared the study of religion (Eliade 1969, 4–5), the religious study of the "other" during the Cold War period "reached for timeless universals in [the] understanding of texts...apart from the squalid mess of history" (Ohmann 1997, 79). As the Wesleyan University *littérateur* Richard Ohmann concluded, the professional "was to be nonpartisan, to abstain from historical agency. Its practitioners, like those in all fields, should stay within their own areas of expertise" (Ohmann 1997, 83). Historians of religion, like their colleagues in literary criticism, viewed their subject matter as "a delicate equipoise of contending attitudes, a disinterested reconciliation of opposing impulses" which, according to critical theorist, Terry Eagleton, "proved deeply attractive to skeptical intellectuals disoriented by the clashing dogmas of the Cold War" (Eagleton 1989, 50). By insisting on ahistorical, descriptive studies, religion, like literary studies, "played...[its] part in the Cold War, not by selling...unwanted expertise, not by perfecting the ideology of free world and evil empire, but by doing our best to take politics out of culture and by naturalizing the routines of social sorting" (Ohmann 1997, 85).

Theoretical Consequences of the Cold War for the Study of Religion

One of the consequences of the Cold War for the study of religion for much of the West—certainly for the United States—is that the thought of Karl Marx was considered by most to be downright un-American. Apart from area studies, consequently, Marxist thought was little read and less taught in the academy (Schreck-

er 1986, 339). There is, for example, not a single citation of Marx "in the *Selected Papers from the American Anthropologist* from 1946 through 1970" (Nader 1997, 120). Western scholars of religion, if they were interested in social-scientific theory at all, were more attracted to traditions of Weber or Durkheim, but especially to Weber who had argued a fundamental relationship among individualism, Protestantism, and capitalism in the modern world (Weber 1958; Krymkowski and Martin 1998). Durkheim was considered too "socialistic" and certainly the atheistic premise of Marxism was considered to be of no concern to those interested in religion. In addition, the Marxist "reductionist" view of religion epitomized all that was subversive to those who viewed religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon. "Some day," Eliade wrote in his journal:

> I would like to analyze the attitude of historicists of all kinds, such as that of Marxists and Freudians—in a word, all those who believe that one can understand culture only by reducing it to something lower (sexuality, economics, history, etc.)—and to show that theirs is a neurotic attitude (Eliade 1977, 144).

Or is the problem that Marxism was understood as a "religious" or "pseudoreligious" alternative to the "orthodox" view of religion and of its study, the view suggested by Niebuhr and represented at Chicago by Joachim Wach (Wach 1958, 37)?

In the judgment of James Thrower, "[w]estern practitioners of *Religionswissenschaft* are, [in one way or another], as committed to 'religion,' as an irreducible reality, as Marxists are to reducing it to some other, more material form of reality" (Thrower 1983, 378). But as Thrower concluded in his study of *Marxist-Leninist 'Scientific Atheism'* (1983), the basic insights of "scientific atheism," despite various problems with the classic formulation of this approach, is for the *Religionswissenschaftlicher*, "the most thorough and consistent naturalistic account yet offered of the phenomenon of religion" (Thrower 1983, 386). The Marxist understanding of religion became, however, a fatality of ideological developments in the Soviet Union (Thrower 1983, 382). Consequently, at the time of his evaluation of a Marxist view of religion in 1983, Thrower concluded that "[f]or ongoing, creative Marxist thinking about religion, we must, alas, for the time being, at least, look elsewhere than to the Soviet Union" (Thrower 1983, 382–383). The theoretical directions for a naturalistic study of religion suggested by Marx remain yet to be fully developed, in the East or in the West, although the suggestions of various neo-Marxist theorists have provided a direction, even if the assumptions and assertions of this direction are often an uncritically appropriated trend (Lewis 1988, 274).

Given the perduring theological infrastructure (*Grundlage*) that has characterized *Religionswissenshaft* since its origin, western developments in a truly academic study of religion have fared little better, though recent work in the area of cognitive psychology is most promising. What would seem to be remedial is a historical documentation of research produced during the period of the Cold War by both eastern and western scholars in the field of religious studies which, shorn of their ideological and theological frameworks, might disclose a complementary theoretical relationship between the "scientific atheism" espoused by a Marxist approach and the "academic" or "humanistic" study of religion alleged by western universities (McCutcheon 1997, 61–64).

Conclusions

The principle, established by the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862, that public universities are instrumentalities of the state was instantiated during the years of the Cold War when it became "an indisputable tenet of the conventional wisdom that the interests of the government and the interests of higher learning are the same" (Lewis 1988, 275). Administrators of those institutions in which charges relating to alleged subversive activities were brought against faculty, more often than not supported the external accusing agencies rather than their own faculty, even though no subversive activity was ever established on U.S. campuses by these accusing agencies (Schrecker 1986, 8; Lewis 1988, 269). As Schrecker concludes, "[t]he academy [generally] did not fight" the influence of Cold War ideology. "It contributed to it" (Schrecker 1986, 340). University administrators transformed themselves, in other words, from those who execute academic policy to academic managers who supervise policy and people (Lewis 1988, 264). Their function as arbiters of what was "acceptable and unacceptable political expression" during the Cold War period (Lewis 1988, 273) is exemplified in the contemporary university by their embrace and eager implementation of "political correctness" (Geiger 1993, 327–331). In the conclusion of Lionel Lewis, "[the] American academic community has slouched through the last…decades ideologically animated but very nearly intellectually moribund" (Lewis 1988, 274).

American society and its institutions, including the university, have, as a whole, been characterized since their founding as profoundly anti-intellectual (Hofstadter 1963). Those few intellectual currents in American life, such as represented by some of the Puritan divines in the seventeenth century or by the influence of Enlightenment thought in the eighteenth century or by that of transcendentalism in the nineteenth were overshadowed by the mass evangelical

movements of the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries known, respectively, as the First and Second "Great Awakening." It is this evangelistic character of American culture that shaped American political as well as religious cultures and that combined the two into the various "crusades" in terms of which an American history may be written (Herberg 1960, 79). This culture of crusades was exemplified by that against communism during the Cold War years with its synthesis of political opportunism and religious fervor. The "academic" study of religion which was developed in the United States during this period must be seen as being in some way legitimated by the religio-political obsessions of that time, certainly in the selection of Asian and Third World "religions" for its dominate subject matter and of a concomitant inattention to Judeo-Christian assumptions. Given the rhetorical formulation of the American Cold War as a crusade against an "atheistic communism," need we wonder any longer at the surfeit of "fideism" still lingering in the "academic" study of religion (Smart 1990, 299; 1993, 59–60)? or at the theologizing, *sui generis* orientations of this field as it continues to champion "distributions of power" reminiscent of "a past era in response to the upheavals of modernity" (McCutcheon 1997, 79)?

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3. Secular Theory and the Academic Study of Religion

> And you thought you'd give me some more material? Alas, I've got too much already ... I don't need any more data. What I need is a theory to explain it all.
>
> – Morris Zapp (Lodge 1984, 28)

i

The academic study of religion, as the rubric itself suggests, should conform in principle to the same protocol as does the academic study of *anything*. Earlier views of "religion" as *sui generis*, together with consequent arguments for some special method that is itself "religious" or that "brackets" what is considered to be "religious" from academic inquiry, deny this fundamental premise. The academic study of religion should, in other words, be in no way privileged—unless, of course, the counterintuitive claims and assumptions characteristic of religious expression be accepted as somehow true (in the ordinary sense of this judgment). Otherwise, something other is at stake in the ubiquity and perseverance of religion than its manifest appeal. To discover this significance requires that the study of religion be *theoretically* based.

Theory is but a kind of generalization; both attempt to explain the greatest amount of data in terms of the fewest number of principles. The former is distinguished from the latter, however, in that theoretically based generalizations should be reflexively established, they should somehow be testable and, if deemed valid, they should provide explanations. In the study of religion, generalizations are based on data concerning certain kinds of human practices, whether discursive or non-discursive, which are generated by comparative (anthropological) and historical research, each of which have their own theoretical problematic (Martin 1997c and Martin 2000).

Traditional examples of theories that offer explanations for religion include intellectualist theories which hold as their primary assumption the view that human beings have a fundamental interest in rationally understanding their environment. This view, consequently, approaches religions primarily in terms of their discourse, i.e., their myths, understanding them as early examples of intellectual acrivity. In reaction to this rationalist view, born of the Enlightenment, some nineteenth-century Romantic theorists argued that religious practices were expressive of some other feature of human life, e.g., the psychological or the social, and they defined religion, consequently, as a symbolic phenomenon. Arising also from Romanticism was an explanation of religion in terms of its

nonrational features. These emotivist theorists explained religion primarily in affective terms and focused on extraordinary personal experiences of some transcendent or universal "other." (On these three classical theories of religion, see Marett 1932, 1; J. Z. Smith 1995, 1068–1069.)

Clearly the human sciences cannot test theories of religion in ways appropriate to the natural sciences. Unlike the invariable laws of nature sought by the natural sciences, the human sciences, including the study of religion, can attempt, however, to differentiate between *valid* and *invalid* generalizations—stereotypes, for example, or ideologically produced fictions. Writing of historiographical generalization, Louis Gottschalk has proposed that validation should:

> at least conform to all the known facts so that if it does not present definitive truth it should at any rate constitute the least inconvenient form of tentative error. That means that it must be subject to certain general standards and tests—of human behavior, of logical antecedents and consequences, of statistical or mass trends (Gottschalk 1963, vi).

A brief consideration of emotive or affective theories of religion can provide an example of such probative endeavors.

I have argued that the widely held theory about religion as personal experience in response to some transcendent "other" is invalid since it represents a generalization about religion based upon the data of a particular religious tradition, namely, the Protestant Reformation principle that "salvation is by [individual] faith alone as confirmed by an *experience* of grace."[5] In its American cultural context, this theological view of religion was given its first *theoretical* formulation by Jonathan Edwards in his "Treatise Concerning Religious Affections" (Edwards 1959 [1746]), a work which has been judged to be "the most profound exploration of the religious psychology in all American literature" (Miller 1949, 177). Written in defense of the "Great Awakening," that first instance of large-scale revivalism that began in the 1720s and spread throughout the American colonies, Edwards held that "true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them" (Edwards 1959, 120). The primary "objective ground" for these experiences is, he argued, "the transcendentally excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves" (Edwards 1959, 240). For Edwards, in other words, religion was based on an unmediated, personal experience in response to and confirmed by the sacred. This emphasis on individual experience relegates other religious practices such

5 The following example is taken from Martin 1993: 76–77, and used here by permission; see also Martin 1994: n. 53.

as discursive or ritual practices to outward and secondary expressions of that inward grace so cherished by Protestants.

A "Second Great Awakening" swept the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth Century, associated interestingly with Edward's grandson, Timothy Dwight. This revival was reinforced by the influence of a popularized form of German Romanticism (Gabriel 1950), which had produced its own experiential view of religion that may be traced from Friedrich Schleiermacher's speeches *On Religion*, first published in 1799, to its most influential theoretical articulation in Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). Independently of Edwards, Schleiermacher had written similarly that "the sum total of religion is to feel that, in its highest unity, all that moves us in feeling is one" (Schleiermacher 1958, 49 – 50); "the true nature of religion is...[this] immediate consciousness of the Deity" (Schleiermacher 1958, 101). And like Edwards, Schleiermacher concluded that religious knowledge and organizations are but a secondary manifestation of this experience of unity with the Infinite (Schleiermacher 1959, 60 – 61, 101, 155 – 156).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the American philosopher, William James, proposed essentially the same view of religion that had first been argued by Edwards—no longer in the discourse of Reformation or Romantic theology, however, but now in that of the newly defined field of psychology that James was so instrumental in popularizing. In his classic Gifford Lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James wrote that religion consists of "the feelings...and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James 1929, 31 – 32), a definition of religion employed also by the philosopher, A. N. Whitehead (Whitehead 1926, 16, though without reference to James). For James, as for the Protestants that preceded him, "personal religion will prove itself more fundamental than either theology or ecclesiaticism. Churches, when once established," he asserted, "live at second-hand upon tradition; but the founders of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine" (James 1929, 31). Consequently, in the conclusion of James, "personal religious experience has its roots and centre in mystical states of consciousness" (James 1929, 370).

According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion* from 1987 little theoretical advance on the subject has been made since James. The author of the article on "Mysticism," after expanding on the characteristics of mysticism offered by James sixty years earlier, concludes that:

> all religions, regardless of their origin, retain their vitality only as long as their members continue to believe in a transcendent reality with which they can in some way communicate by direct experience (Dupré 1987, 246).

The condition requisite to the validation of generalizations about religion being based upon personal experience is preeminently that of an individualistic anthropology, a condition which did not exist in the cultures of Western antiquity, for example (Martin 1994), where the denigration of feeling in the face of reason by classical Greek culture would, in any case, argue in favor of intellectualist theories. Nor does this valuation of the individual over the collective characterize most of the modern, non-Western world (which is quite different than valuing the *raison d'être* of the social entity as the care of the individual, e.g., Pl. *Lg.* 9.875). Rather this individualistic anthropology arose with the Renaissance differentiation of the "humanities" from the "divinities" as a legitimate field of intellectual inquiry (*vide* "humanity. 4" *OED* 1971, 1346), and a concurrent emergence of an individualistic ideology, including individualistic psychology, the assumptions of which are so compatible with Reformation principles (*vide* "psychology: Note," *OED* 1971, 2347). While questions concerning individual religious experience may and certainly have been posed of such religions as Hinduism or Confucianism, they would seem to impose rather than reveal much of salience concerning such ritually and socially structured systems. Emotivist theories of religion are, in other words, culturally specific and, consequendy, do not offer valid generalizations for the historical or comparative study of religion.

In contrast to individualistic psychologies, cognitive psychology offers a promising theoretical alternative in that it is concerned with those mental processes that are common to all humans. Since environmental (perceptual, cultural) input is attributed significance only as it is processed by human minds, the workings of the mind becomes central for understanding the production of any cultural formation, including the religious. This is not to suggest that attempts to map the workings of the mind will finally establish some sort of innate human "need" for religion; such mappings seek rather to identify a common mental architecture which has constrained the construction of a virtually infinite variety of human systems of meanings. In this regard also, cognitive psychology offers a promising alternative in that it seeks empirical, i.e., intersubjective validity for its conclusions. (For sustained attempts to connect cognition and culture specifically with reference to religion, see Lawson and McCauley 1990 and Boyer 1992, 1994.)

The alternative examples of psychological theories of religion, individualistic and collective, draw our attention to a second feature of theoretical generalization. Since such generalizations must be tested against the same comparative and historical data upon which the generalizations were based in the first place, it is *theory* and not data that finally determines our view of religion. Since theoretical formulations, as the example of emotivist theory suggests, are themselves subject to the historical influences of religious, political, economic, etc.

interests, they must in turn be themselves rigorously subjected to their historical situation and to critical reflection.

ii

The theory of religion with which I work (currently, at least) is that religion is (a) a social system (b) legitimated by claims to the authority of some superhuman power. This theoretical formulation offers a provisional or hypothetical sociological definition to be tested against the empirical research of cognitive psychology, on the one hand, and against comparative and historical research, on the other. Does this theory explain the greatest amount of data in terms of these two features? Do significant exceptions remain? Or does the theory so over-determine the data to be selected that exceptions are *a priori* ruled out? Does the theory differentiate that which it explains from functionally similar systems?

Human beings, social scientists and philosophers seem to agree, are social animals, as the universal existence of human language, i. e., the means of intersubjective communication, argues. This sociability is apparently an innate characteristic of the species, whether the structures of this trait be explained as cultural elaborations of biology (Boyer, 1990, Burkert, 1996) or as the consequence of a domain-specific competence of the human mind (Hirschfeld, 1994). We can, in any case, conclude that such cultural products as religion are, at least, social facts.

Human beings organize their social productions systemically, which, to take our clue again from language, may be viewed as the establishment of closed sets of relationships in which the value of interdependent elements results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others (Saussure 1966, 114). Following the work of W. Robertson Smith, anthropologists identify but two types of social systems: "kinship" and "kingship" (W. R. Smith 1972 [1889], ch. 2). Smith defined "kinship societies" as those in which "[e]very human being, without choice on his own part, but simply in virtue of his birth and upbringing, becomes a member of" (W. R. Smith 1972, 29)—a notion of "natural societies" that may be traced from Aristotle (*Pol.* I. 1.4 – 6). By contrast, Smith defines "kingship" as a transformation of kinship groups into "an aristocracy of the more powerful kins" with a consequent unequal distribution of wealth (W. R. Smith 1972, 73). The difference between these two types might be summarized as a difference in the social distribution of power. Whereas power in kinship societies is disseminated more or less equally throughout the society (W. R. Smith 1972, 73), kingships are characterized by consolidations of power (see Sagan 1985, 236, 240; Martin 1997a and

1997b). These two types of societies are, of course, "ideal"; historical societies represent sundry incremental variations between these two types.

Social distributions of power may be differentiated further into specialized systems such as the political—concerned with the structures of power, the economic—concerned with rules of exchange, the ethical—concerned with principles of right relationship, the aesthetic—concerned with criteria of pleasure, etc. The special function of religious systems is to identify and maintain the markers of collective identity for the social entity—its history, for example, is often narrated in terms of origins from such superhuman powers as heroes or deities, its boundaries defined in such terms as ritual purity/impurity—and to establish the legitimacy of these markers by appeal to the authority of superhuman power. Such claims to legitimacy are claims to privilege deemed unavailable to "others," unless they too become subject to those claims and, consequently, to that group claiming legitimation on the basis of those claims. Such claims to legitimacy may escalate religious claims to the proposition that the religious system, especially though not necessarily when it operates in consort with the political system (Dumont 1980), is the system of systems, whether for a particular social entity or for an idealized and universalized utopia.

Whether and how religious systems are differentiated from their sibling systems is the consequence of their particular histories. In Judeo-Christian-Islamic cultures, for example, religious systems are identified with the moral, whereas in ancient Greece, morality was not deemed the purview of religion but of the intellectual system (philosophy). In the United States, the religious and the political systems are constitutionally separate but in ancient Greece and Rome, the former is embedded in the latter while in some contemporary Islamic cultures they are juridically identified.

Although systems common to a particular social group may be differentiated according to some specialized function, they replicate one another formally, not only as constructs constrained by common cognitive processes (Sperber 1996, 101) but also as structures produced by a common social history. Confederations of kinship societies, for example, tend towards confederations of kin deities, or towards polytheism, whereas condensations of power in kingship societies tend to be characterized by some form of heno- or monotheism. In this perspective, religion is a social system that is formally identical to any other system in a given society. Whether or not they are identified with their sibling systems, embedded within or deemed to be independent of them, the analytical *differentia* for religious systems remains their claims to the authority of superhuman power.

Superhuman power may be imagined anthropomorphically or theriomorphically as in the case of theistic systems, or dendromorphically, petromorphically, etc., as in the case of "animistic" systems, or abstractly, as exemplified by the

Chinese notion of "Tao"—which in the context of that culture is itself further imaginable aesthetically ("Taoism"), ethically, socially, politically ("Confucianism"), theistically (in "traditional" local practices), etc. Further, superhuman power may be imagined as supernatural. The Olympian deities of ancient Greece, for example, were understood as superhuman but not supernatural: whereas they were possessed of greater power than humans, they were nevertheless still subject to the same laws of nature (i.e., fate). The creator deity of Christianity, however, is imagined (anthropologically) as a supernatural power, standing above the nature he created and capable of altering its very laws (e.g., miracle). In other words, all supernatural images are superhuman but not all superhuman images are supernatural.

By analytically differentiating religion from other social systems in terms of claims to superhuman power, we are able to avoid the functionalist tendency of analyzing virtually anything and everything as "religion." This definition precludes, for example, the popular cold-war-era analysis of Marxism as a "religion" (if a demonic one!), for whatever one might conclude of Marxism, its appeal to legitimacy is not to superhuman power but to a materialistic historical dialectic. Similarly, Freud's appeal to the inevitable and ubiquitous conflict between nature (id) and the environment (civilization, internalized as superego) as the explanation for the dynamics of the psyche precludes, by the definition under consideration, the analysis of Freudianism as a religion—although Jungianism, it would seem, well conforms to the criteria of religion here suggested (Noll 1997).

The generalization about religion as a social system legitimated by claims to the authority of superhuman power is, admittedly, a minimalist theory of religion. Although it does account for a large amount of religious data—more so, I would argue, than the two theories mentioned earlier and the one briefly essayed, and it does so while still distinguishing religious from non-religious systems—it does so in a wholly formal way. Like any social system, however, religion is a *human* affair. It remains for specialized scholars of the various religious systems and of their traditions to amplify such formal analyses of religious systems with those historically produced and transmitted social practices, both discursive and non-discursive, which establish each and every religion system as a unique system of meaning for its participants and practitioners.

iii

If the academic study of religion should conform to the same protocol as the academic study of *anything*, then the role of the scholar of religion should conform to that which is appropriate to academic study generally. This academic study,

nowhere defined more clearly and forthrightly than by Max Weber, should be "in the service of self-clarification [what I have meant by theory] and knowledge of interrelated facts [what I have meant by systems]." The academic study of religion, Weber continues, should "not [be conceived as] the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe" (Weber 1946 [1919], 152). This is religious *practice*. "In the lecture rooms of the university," Weber concluded, "no other virtue holds but plain intellectual integrity" (Weber 1946, 156). "Integrity" is a value often invoked, within the academy and without, as a noble virtue devoid, however, of much specificity. I invoke it here, in the spirit of Weber, to indicate commitment to the academic ideal of theoretically based inquiry leading to explanatory principles supported by intersubjective conclusions.

Unlike some earlier attempts to limit the study of religion to an empathetic understanding of others, such intellectual integrity in the academy requires this study be a *critical* discipline as well. As such, the role of the scholar of religion must finally include a responsibility to venture judgements about religions. Such critique might be of religious claims which are based upon common sense, on the one hand, or of those born of propaganda, on the other. Vico defined common sense, a consequence of the social nature of human beings, as "judgement without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race" (Vico 1970, 21), an example of which are the views of religion as experiential discussed above. Propaganda, on the other hand, is the ideological challenge to social consensus by special interest groups (Merton 1968, 160, 563), whether those groups might be exemplified by some new religious movement interested in propagating its own view of religion or the study of such groups from a particular ideological perspective even if in the context of the academy itself. Neither common sense nor propaganda are necessarily false; neither, however, do common assumptions nor fervent advocacy establish validity. Born of comparative as of specialized research, the critical assessment of religious claims as well as of explanatory generalizations about religions constitute finally the public task of the scholar of religion.

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4. Of Religious Syncretism, Comparative Religion and Spiritual Quests

> From the time when religions mingled in the Graeco-Roman world, thinkers have been compelled to evaluate their own beliefs and practices in relation to those of other peoples and races, but it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century of our era that a serious attempt was made to apply scientific principles to the comparative and historical study of the subject.
>
> —William James 1961 [1902]: 15

i

As is by now well known, the notion of "syncretism" as an analytical category in the academic study of religion derives from J. G. Droysen's nineteenth-century description of Hellenistic culture as "the east and west mixture of people" occasioned by the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. and by his policy of Hellenization which was continued by his successors (Droysen 1980, Vol. 1, *Vorzvort zur Zweiten Auflage*). Alexander's vision for his imperialist ventures might be characterized as the transformation of this "new world society into a world community," an ecumenical reorientation that would involve the transformation of religious as well as social and political life. This characterization might be Alexander's but it is not; it is W. C. Smith's description of what he termed the "fundamental human problem of our time" (1962, 12–14, emphasis added). Already in his 1962 volume, *The Faith of Other Men* (1989), Smith avers that this "new world order" necessarily involves what he later terms a "world theology," the construction of which has been characterized as syncretistic in the sense of diverse religious forms representing a common transcendental reality (Sharpe 1975, 252, 257), a sense reminiscent of Apuleius' neo-Platonically inspired *Hymn to Isis* (*Met.* xi, 5), the *locus classicus* of the notion of syncretism (Hammond and Scullard 1970, 1029). The means whereby this universalistic religious transformation might occur, according to Smith, is through "comparative religion" (1962, 14, 20).

Eric Sharpe locates Smith in a long tradition of comparative study which represents the position that comparative religion should be pursued in service of constructing a global theology. As Mac Ricketts concludes in his review of Smith's volume, *The Faith of Other Men:* "The author is to be commended for his attempt to move beyond pure scholarship to [the] 'practical application'" of building a "world community of brotherhood and love" (1965–1966, 745, and cited on the book jacket of Smith 1962). This tradition, according to Sharpe,

stretches from F. Max Müller and Rudolf Otto to Radhakrishnan (Sharpe 1975, 272, 283), to which we might now add Ross Reat, Edmund Perry, Ursula King and Andreas Grünschloß (Reat and Perry 1991; King 1993; Grünschloß 1994). Even Max Müller, one of the first to argue for a scientific character for the comparative study of religion,

> anticipated a new religion...for the whole world...firmly founded on a belief on the One God, the same in the Vedas, the same in the Old, the same in the New Testament, the same in the Koran, the same also in the hearts of those who have no longer any Vedas or Upanishads or any Sacred Books whatever between themselves and their God (Müller 1884, 80 – 81).

This goal of seeing in the gods of differing religions "nothing but names of what [is] beyond all names" is, Müller concluded, "[o]ne of the many lessons" which a comparative study of the historical religions may teach us (1880, 363 – 364).

To give an example from another influential tradition of comparative religion, the phenomenological/hermeneutical, Joachim Wach, in his book, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, approvingly cites Herbert Schneider's proleptic complaint that the "reconciliation of the spirit of freedom with the spirit of religious devotion or commitment [in twentieth-century America] has become a serious problem of public morality" (1958, 7; Schneider 1952, 33). Wach, like Smith, proposes to address this problem through a theology informed by comparative religion. "If," he writes,

> it is the task of theology to investigate, buttress, and teach the faith of a religious community to which it is committed, as well as to kindle zeal and fervor for the defense and spread of this faith, it is the responsibility of a comparative study to guide and to purify it (Wach 1958, 9).

This purification of the faith, according to Wach, might well involve "the subjection of one's religious faith to a judgment pronounced in the name of some generalized notions" (1958, 9), that is to say, in the name of that syncretism which Wach wistfully remembers to have characterized "some of the gatherings of those of different faiths around the turn of the last century" (1958, 7).

The thesis of this paper is that comparative religion as exemplified by Smith and Wach, but also as it has been practiced in the academy generally, is largely indistinguishable from the historical syncretisms of religious practice. As Russell McCutcheon has recently concluded in a review of comparative religion textbooks, the "dominant and virtually unaltered presupposition" of comparativists during the last century and a half is that they "like the people they study, are also 'worshippers' on their own spiritual quest" (McCutcheon 1997, 105; see

also Wiebe 1993 and 1998). This syncretistic agenda represents, in the words of the Dutch comparative religionist, Peter van der Veer, "a positive strategy to contain conflict and promote tolerance, or, in recent parlance, at least dialogue" (1994, 197). This point of view is supported, tacitly at least, by the American Academy of Religion (AAR); for example, a recent "Call for Papers" by the New England Maritime Region of the AAR included among its solicited sections one on "interfaith dialogue/comparative religions" (*Religious Studies News* 1995, 24). It comes as no surprise, therefore, to note a recent volume of studies on the contact between Christianity and other religions entitled *Dialogue and Syncretism* (Gort *et al.* 1989; but now see Aigmer 1995). What must be kept in mind, however, is that, as van der Veer concludes, syncretism becomes "a very interesting...concept [only] when it is seen as part of religious discourse" itself (van der Veer 1994, 208).

ii

The historical sense of syncretism in religious discourse since the Protestant Reformation has been well rehearsed (Pye 1971; Martin 1983; Rudolph 1979; Stewart and Shaw 1994, 3–5). In its theological usage, a pure or authorized religious truth is contrasted with local contaminations and corruptions. For instance, André Droogers has argued that it is religious challenges to normative theological views that constitute a syncretistic field of study in the first place. "The fact that many students of religion have not seen this," he concludes, "is a consequence of the clerical perspective they—often implicitly—have adopted" (Gort 1989, 20).

In a recent collection of anthropologically oriented essays, *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, in which van der Veer's article appeared (Stewart and Shaw 1984), Charles Stewart associates syncretism further with larger nineteenth-century European concerns about linguistic, racial, and cultural purity (Stewart 1994), ideological concerns that might profitably be contrasted with an alternative political construction of the same century, the American image of the "melting-pot." Further, I have suggested in an earlier article that there exists a relationship between syncretism and the positivistic assumptions of nineteenth-century historicism (Martin 1995b). All of these senses, van der Veer traces back to the eighteenth-century "emergence of the notion of natural religion as a belief in and worship of a supreme power found among all human beings" (1994, 197); this notion of religious syncretism therefore describes alternative manifestations of some postulated essentialism (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 163), whether in the sense of *primordia*, *consequentiae*, or *univer-*

sa. This essentialist or *sui generis* understanding of religion has also characterized its comparative study. The emphasis in these studies, remaining on the recurring themes of what is taken to be an autonomous subject matter, can therefore also be understood as a form of religious syncretism (Gort 1989, 17).

Whereas practitioners might, from this perspective, decry perceived corruptions of their tradition's purity, those in the liberal, scholarly traditions of comparison tend to view syncretism positively, as the path to an essential spiritual truth that is universally, if imperfectly, expressed in its local variations. Comparativists, consequently, have typically been enamored especially of Buddhist thought not only because of its oft-remarked transcultural syncretisms (Reat and Perry 1991, 82–83), but because its notion of nirvana is often idealized as "the purist expression of the central spiritual reality of humankind encountered in the world's religions" (Reat and Perry 1991, 85). Besides, in the telling observation of W. C. Smith, Buddhism, "of all the great 'religious' movements in human history" is regarded as having the closest affinity to Christianity (1989, 136–137). However, the comparative study of religion, whatever the syncretic nature of its subject matter, must itself remain separate from such essentialist assumptions if it is to be scientific—unless, of course, this science is held to be in service to religious practice, as W. C. Smith and Wach assert and others tacitly presume.

iii

The understanding of syncretism as a neutral description of religious phenomena seems to be the current academic alternative to its comparative practice. Stewart and van der Veer argue, however, that syncretism is "a useless concept...when seen as a simple descriptive term" (van der Veer 1994, 208; Stewart 1994, 127). Echoing an argument made at least since the beginning of this century, Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, the editors of the aforementioned volume of anthropological essays, agree: "Simply identifying a ritual or tradition as 'syncretic' tells us very little and gets us practically nowhere, since all religions have composite origins and are continually reconstructed through ongoing processes of synthesis and erasure" (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 7; Griffis 1912, 192; Baird 1971, 146). As I have argued elsewhere, describing religions as syncretistic formations is simply a redundant rearticulation of what ostensibly is the starting point for any history of religions, namely, *that any and all religious practices are historical formations* (Martin 1994, 1995b, 33–34). The dominant scholarly logic seems to be that syncretism as a religio-historical process may be accurately described by the analytical category of syncretism—an empty redundancy that lacks the

striking ironic possibilities of the Western artistic convention in which a picture appears within a picture (Danto 1992, 7–29). Besides, Brigit Meyer, citing André Droogers, has observed that scholarly attempts to describe syncretic formations seem, in any case, to intend an explanation rather than a description insofar as they contest local explanations (Meyer 1994, 46; Gort 1994, 20).

What is required in the study of syncretistic formations are historical investigations of local and particularized religious practices without reference to some allegedly universal standard-whether that canon is imagined by the participant or by the scholar (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 42). Portraying such singular characterizations of the Hellenistic period as an "age of suffering" or "age of anxiety" (Cumont 1956, 43; Dodds 1970), to which we might add W. C. Smith's identification of an "ecumenical reorientation" as "the fundamental problem of our time," or Schneider's identification of public morality as the problem of twentieth-century America, is, Ramsey MacMullan writes sardonically: "as if one were to say, 'in Italy, Switzerland, the Low Countries, Britain, France, and Spain between 1400 and 1600, people were tense and worried.'" Such statements, he concludes, deny "the very change and complexity which it is the job of historians to discover" (MacMullen 1981, 123). More recently, Michael Pye has reaffirmed his understanding of syncretism, first advanced in 1971, as a term "no longer used to imply a reprehensible diminution or jumbling up of religion" but as the historical "description and analysis" of specific case studies (Pye 1994, 219). The case of Christian origins presents a good example.

Typically, the practices of Christians during their early centuries were contrasted with Hellenistic religions, which were characterized preeminently by their "syncretism" (Grant 1953, xiii). Already by the end of the last century, however, members of the German *Religionsgeschichtlicheschule* began to argue that Christianity, like Judaism before it, was itself a syncretistic religion (Kummel 1972, 214–225). As Hermann Gunkel concluded in 1903:

> Important religious elements that came from foreign sources are contained in it...The Christianity which was destined to be preached to many nations was itself not the product of one nation, but sprang from the complex history of many nations (1903, 455).

Some thirty years later (1934), Walter Bauer extended Gunkel's thesis with his own pioneering argument for a plurality of early Christianities. Rather than a view of Christianity based on the teachings of Jesus, propagated by the disciples and resulting in a harmonious set of essential beliefs and practices shared by the various Christian churches, Bauer's research suggested a situation of diversity from the beginning. These various Christian traditions arrived at an ideology of catholicity only as the consequence of a politico-theological process of selec-

tive exclusion and syncretistic inclusion that received politico-ecclesiastical definition only during the fourth century. It is this historical model of local variation, and not later mythic claims to canonical unity, that is now accepted by historians of religion as the model for the first three centuries of Christianity (J. Z. Smith 1990; Mack 1995).

The enormous variation within the subsequent historical spectrum of Christianities in the modem world is obvious—an observation which I suspect is the case with any and all religious traditions; and, on this point, Buddhism offers itself as an exemplum. Local variation, in other words, *is all there is!* The question remains, consequently: how might a non-religious, scientific comparison of religions, historically described as the ubiquity of locally contingent syncretistic formations, proceed?

iv

Jonathan Z. Smith has noted the influence of the field of comparative anatomy upon the development of the comparative study of religion (1978: 254 – 256). Already at the beginning of the century, however, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* defined "comparative anatomy" as a term: "falling into desuetude...[which] lingers practically only in the titles of books or in the designation of university chairs...; [for] all investigations into anatomical structure must be comparative..." (emphasis added) (Anon. 1910). Thus, when Smith emphasizes seventy years later that "[religion has no independent existence" but rather "is created by the scholar's imaginative acts of comparison and generalization" (1983, 217), he too is arguing that even though all religions might be local syncretisms, all study of these formations must necessarily be comparative. More recently, Stewart and Shaw, emphasize that "just as religions are not 'given' entities, [so too] equivalences are not simply 'there' as channels through which meanings from different religions flow automatically." Rather, both syncretic and comparative elements "must be *perceived* as equivalences and given significance as such" (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 16, emphasis added). Such categorical perceptions as "syncretisms" and "comparatives," in other words, are categories which, like all generalizations, are constrained by both culture and cognition; that is to say, they are not only the products of specific cultural contexts but input from such contexts as processed by human minds (Pinker 1994, 125). Such cognitive operations are, of course, neither "religious" nor "irreligious," religiosity being a culturally conferred quality. As William James already argued, socio-cultural claims to superhuman powers have no distinctive sense content; as imaginal reality, however, they may be altered to accord with historical and cultural change without in any way

affecting their instrumentality (1961, 59 – 62). Comparative studies of religious representations have focused on typologizing these imaginal "counter intuitive claims" which constitute, however, only the culturally specific claims of religion. Such comparative studies represent, consequently, ethnocentric perceptions of similarities among the proliferation of local syncretistic formations which document that domain of human activity we nominate as the religious. Since such historical data have been generated by common human cognitive processes (Boyer 1994, 111), comparativists might well structure their generalizations in light of what is known of these processes.

More recently, Thomas Lawson, echoing an observation made by Jonathan Z. Smith almost twenty-five years ago, has written that "[f]rom infancy human beings are by necessity engaged in the act of comparison...This [fundamental cognitive] process of comparison," Lawson continue, "involves a number of important conceptual activities, among them the process of classification (putting things into categories, or if you prefer seeing objects and events as examples of types)" (Lawson 1996, 31; J. Z. Smith 1978, 240). The notions of comparison and syncretism, in other words, belong to the same cognitive processes of selective assimilation and differentiation. Lawson cautions, however, that "while it is one thing to possess a skill or capacity, it is quite another thing to employ that skill fruitfully when faced with particularly complex cultural materials such as a world of religious practices" (1996, 32). When comparativism is indistinguishable from what is compared, namely from the ubiquity of syncretistic religious practices, we are not employing this skill in any fruitful way. The selective principles underlying syncretistic formations, Stewart suggests, not only "comprise a mode of describing religion...[but] at the most...can amount to a theory of religion" (1994, 128). While advances in the cognitive sciences offer such a theory of religion which includes a clearly stated basis for comparative study, we still await clear methodological direction for this promising field, a more precise connecting, as it were, of cognition and comparison. Apart from some such theorizing, however, the enterprise of comparative study will most certainly retain its traditional association with the syncretistic model of religious practice.

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5. To Use "Syncretism," or Not to Use "Syncretism": That is the Question

I entitle my contribution to the discussion on retrofitting "syncretism" with allusion to Hamlet's famous soliloquy because of my conclusion that use of this category still presumes, as does Shakespeare's original line, an ontology or, ontology's progeny, theology (*Hamlet* III.i.56). Born, in modern usage, of seventeenth-century Protestant irenics in the face of Roman Catholic hegemony, the term was later employed in Protestant apologetics to characterize Graeco-Roman paganism and, ironically, early Catholic developments alike,[6] the latter, Gibbon assured us, contributing to the fall of Rome itself (Gibbon 1854).[7] In recent years, considerable effort has been expended in attempts to redefine the category as one of historical description (e. g., Berner 1979; Pye 1971; Rudolf 1979). Since descriptive generalizations always replicate the same data as the evidence itself, together with their theoretical assumptions (Glopnik and Wellman 1994, 260), such transcriptive efforts necessarily retain some normative point of reference to non-syncretistic origins characteristic of earlier usages. Similarly, more recent social-scientific usages of the category inevitably imply criteria of power whereby some form of institutional or social legitimacy is presumed (Shaw and Stewart 1994; Benavides 1995).

Despite the perseverance of some presumed *sui generis* status associated with uses of the category "syncretism," its continuing attraction for scholars seems to rise from a nagging presentiment that all religions are, in fact, historically constructed and culturally contingent. If normative assumptions are eschewed, however, and we conclude that all religious formations are in some sense syncretistic, then, as Robert Baird concluded over twenty-five years ago, the category ceases to have any significant descriptive, much less theoretical, power (Baird 1971, 142–155).

A number of years ago, I suggested that "syncretism," rather than being understood as a diachronic category, may retain some usefulness as a synchronic category by which a closed set of relationships and the mechanism of their transformations are defined (Martin 1983). If the notion of "syncretism" is to have any significance in this systemic sense, however, we must, as with any systemic analy-

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6 · On the seventeenth-century "Syncretists," see Moffatt 1922, 12: 155–57; on "syncretism" as a generalization about "pagan" religion see Réville (son of the Protestant theologian, Albert Réville), 1886; on the Protestant apologetic characterization of early Catholic developments as syncretistic, see J. Z. Smith, 1990, Ch. 1.

7 · Gibbon writes that the "sublime and simple theology of the primitive Christians...already clouded by metaphysical subtleties [2: 323–4], was degraded by the introduction of a popular mythology, which tended to restore the reign of polytheism" (Gibbon 1854, 3, 161; see also 636–637).

sis, be able to discern and to describe the rules whereby syncretistic formations are produced and even be able to predict, thereby, their formation and character, at least in explanatory principle. Otherwise, we are left either with a redundant category of redescription, "[e]verything," in the words of the poet, "only connected by 'and' and 'and'" (Bishop 1984, 58), or with a normative category of historical reference or socio-political control. For help in discovering the rules of syncretistic systems, we might turn briefly from the human sciences to look for analogies from the natural sciences, specifically biology.

i

Prior to Darwin, most natural scientists accepted a supernatural order for nature, a closed system devised according to God's plan. In this view, the multiplicity of organisms from the lowest forms up to man was understood to have existed from the outset of the universe and simply to have replaced themselves from their own line (Orel 1966, 10). Consequently, hybrids, a pejorative designation presumably derived from the Greek *hubris*, were regarded by theologians and biologists alike as an outrage against nature, the unnatural products of species created as separate and distinct (e. g., Tillich 1957, Vol. 2, 49 – 51). Jonathan Z. Smith has noted that whereas heterogeneity in religious taxonomies continues to be "denigrated by terms such as 'syncretism' and 'accommodation,'" hybridization is now viewed in modern biological classifications as "a positive adaptive mechanism" (J. Z. Smith 1996, 387 – 403). We read in the fourth edition of *A Dictionary of Genetics*, for example, that "hybridization" or "heterosis" designates "greater vigor in terms of growth, survival, and fertility...usually from crosses between highly inbred lines" (King and Stansfield 1990, 147).

Positive views of hybridization can be traced from practical concerns arising from the domestication of animals and the cultivation of plants already in antiquity; estimates range from as early as the tenth millennium B. C. (Stubbe 1972, 1; Orel 1966, 7). These practices early led to observations about inheritance, namely that subsequent generations reproduced, to some extent, characteristics of the former. Motivated economically, attempts were begun to maximize desirable traits through selection and breeding (Stubbe 1972, 1 – 11; Roberts 1965, 1 – 12; Zirkle 1946, 92). Debate surrounding these observations was primarily over whether or not "acquired" as well as "natural" characteristics were transmitted. Despite some doubts by Aristotle (*GA* 1.18 but see 1.17), the view that both were inherited dominated biological theory through the nineteenth century and the theories of Chevalier de Lamarck (Lamarck 1802; 1809; 1915).

The Greeks first proposed a theoretical approach to species propagation and their explanation was "pangenesis" (the term itself is Darwin's [1988 (1868)]). Although rejected by Aristotle (*GA* 1, 17–18), pangenesis was the widespread idea that semen "comes from all parts of the body" (e. g., Hippocrates, *Aër.* 14; *de Genit*. 1.3; Democritus acc. to Plutarch, *de Plac. Phil.* 5.3; Epicurus acc. to Diogenes Laertius 10.66; Sphaerus acc. to Diogenes Laeretius 7; Zeno *Stoic*. 158; Lucretius 4. 1041–1047; the Stoics generally acc. to Plutarch, *de Plac. Phil.* 5.11; Ps.-Galen, *Anim*. 2; and Clement of Alexandria, *Paed*. 2.11). Although both males and females, according to Hipprocrates, produce semen (*de Genit.* 7.480.7 f.) (Stubbe 1972, 29), male semen was considered "stronger" as evidenced by men being rendered "feeble" following "the evacuation of such a small quantity" (*de Genit.* 1)[8]—a bit of folk sexology that still informs contemporary views of male vulnerability.[9] This theory nevertheless emphasized the functional equality of the sexes since the dominance of one trait or another was explained by differing ratios between the semen of the parents. According to Hippocrates:

> If the generative matter contains more semen from a given part of the male body than from the same part of the woman the child will resemble his father more with respect to that part: and a greater amount of semen from a given part of the female body means that the child will resemble the mother more with regard to that part (*de Genit.* 7.480.7 f.).

Heredity came to be understood, consequently, by some variation of this "blending" theory, the notion that "certain traits of an offspring are an average of those of its parents because of the blending of their fluidlike germinal influences" (King and Stansfield 1990, 40). Some form of pangenesis and the "blending theory" of inheritance dominated biological theory until the beginning of the twentieth century. Whereas "blending" may well be an intuitive description of biological, as well as religious, descent, its explanation remained a mystery.[10]

The introduction of scientific method in agriculture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries required a more precise explanation of and predictability

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8 Similarly, Galen, according to Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037), also held that "there are two semens, masculine and feminine, both of which go by the name of 'sperm'...In each of the two semens there is the power of formation (*Canon med.* III, 19, 1, 3; see Galen *de Sem.*)

9 Reportedly, Milton Berle's wife commented that should "all of the women who claimed to have slept with [President John F.] Kennedy are telling the truth, he would not have strength enough to lift a teacup, let alone deal with Khruschev" (Hugh Sidey, "Busy in Bed, but also in Berlin," *Time*, November 16, 1997: 46).

10 The most common attempt to explain religious syncretism as a blending is that of Hegelian synthesis, e. g., the thesis of F. C. Baur and the so-called "Tübingen School" on Christian origins (Tetz 1957, 1: 935–938; Préaux 1978, 7).

for applied practices of selective breeding. The "discovery" in 1900 of Gregor Mendel's 1866 publication, *Experiments in Plant Hybridization*, provided this explanation.[11]

A student of the Austrian mathematician and physicist, Christian Doppler, Mendel had discovered the numerical relations of the different kinds of character-types among progeny, and formulated laws to explain their ratios (Roberts 1965; Orel 1966, 68 – 69, 76, 112, 165 – 66, 178). Mendel's genetic discoveries were crucial to the acceptance of Darwinian evolution by the scientific community, for blending theory does not account for the appearance of the new traits which natural selection requires (Dawkins 1989, 34). Similarly, understandings of religious syncretisms as willy-nilly blendings, i. e., hybrid consequences of cultural contact unconstrained by any theory of their production, offer no accounts for the innovative character often attributed to syncretistic formations.

"The evolutionary approach," Jonathan Z. Smith has noted, by factoring in "the dynamics of change and persistence over time in response to adaptation to a given environment, has produced useful theory and comparisons in the biological sciences." There is "nothing in principle," Smith concludes, "that would prevent fruitful application to the human sciences as well" (Smith 1982, 24). Since Smith wrote these lines, there has been a resurgence in the employment of evolutionary theory, not only in the biological sciences but in numerous fields from cosmology to consciousness as well. (For the application of the Darwinian model of evolution to cosmology, see Smolin 1997; for an application of Darwinian evolutionary theory to consciousness, see Deacon 1997). Why not cultural formations also?

ii

Basic to any understanding of religious syncretism, it would seem, is the question of the replication and transformation of the religious tokens that constitute any syncretistic formation.[12] In his now classic study of "the selfish gene" (1989), Ri-

11 ·I should like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Dr. Dalibor Papoušek for arranging, in connection with lectures I gave in December 1997 at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, a visit to the Mendelianum, a department of the Moravian Regional Museum, now maintained in the monastery buildings where Mendel lived and conducted his experiments and to Dr. Jiří Sekerák of the Mendelianum who hosted my visit there and provided me an excellent introduction to the life and work of Mendel.

12 ·Religious tokens are those cultural representations which are based on conceptually primitive categories and will, thereby, tend to become those most readily transmitted and/or identified with one another. By conceptually most primitive, I follow the usage of Justin Barrett to designate mental categories that are either innate or that are formed very early in childhood development. Barrett has

chard Dawkins has suggested that such cultural transmissions might be understood as "analogous to genetic transmission" (Dawkins 1989, 189). Dawkins coined the term "meme" to name the cultural unit of replication and defined it as "an entity capable of being transmitted from one brain to another" (Dawkins 1989, 196). "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so," he suggests, "memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins 1989, 192). Dawkins even suggests that the transmission of memes might actually be "realized physically...as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men":

> When you plant a fertile meme in...[another's] mind you literally parasitize...[that] brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell (Dawkins 1989, 192).[13]

Whether cognitively or physiologically transmitted, we may question, second, how syncretistic formations are constructed from those religious units or tokens which are transmitted. Dawkins suggested that memetic transmission, although basically conservative, "can give rise to a form of evolution" (Dawkins 1989, 189), "the inexorable battle," in the formulation of Richard Brodie, "of replicators for access to whatever replication mechanisms are available" (Brodie 1996, 83). As Dawkins notes, "some memes are more successful in the meme-pool than others," and their survival depends upon the same qualities of natural selection which operate with genetic replicators (Dawkins 1989, 194). He concluded that:

> [s]election favours memes that exploit their cultural environment to their own advantage. This cultural environment consists of other memes which are also being selected. The

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suggested that "superhuman powers" or "god" is such a category (Barrett 1997). If this hypothesis is experimentally supported, it would explain why Herodotus, for example, when confronted with Egyptian culture, selected precisely their deities for identification with those of the Greeks (*theocrasia*) rather than their more developed or culturally elaborated "religious" ideas, practices, symbols, etc. Especially in the context of such cultures in contact, like those of the Mediterranean in antiquity, we might predict the character of syncretistic formations since they share not only cognitive coincidence but also such categories as they are inferentially developed in cultural context. Such syncretism is to be explained, in other words, not by the fortuitous conflation of cultural detritus, nor by metaphysical/theological attributions of a "monotheistic tendency" upon which one or another religion capitalized and finally got right but by a cognitive reductionism in which all religions participate.

13 · Dawkins added in the new edition of his work that if "memes in brains are analogous to genes they must be self-replicating brain structures, actual patterns of neuronal wiring-up that reconstitute themselves in one brain after another" (1989, 323).

> meme pool therefore comes to have the attributes of an evolutionarily stable set, which new memes find it hard to invade (Dawkins 1989, 199).

Despite the evolutionary stable set which meme-selection establishes, Dawkins notes that it nevertheless "looks as though meme transmission is subject...to blending" (Dawkins 1989, 195). He concludes, however, that "this appearance of non-particulateness" is as illusory as was the theory of blending in pre-Mendelian views of inheritance (Dawkins 1989, 195). "Differences in the ways that people represent [these replicators] are," Dawkins concludes, "by definition, not part of the meme" (Dawkins 1989, 196). Particular idea-memes are simply "held in common by all brains that understand" that idea (Dawkins 1989, 196). The explanation for the evolution and configuration of a given syncretistic formation would then consist of identifying those representations which are most successful at replicating, under what conditions, and why–including the occasional mutation from which a new cultural strain may result (following Sperber 1996, 101).

In his recent book, *Explaining Culture*, Dan Sperber applauds Dawkins' suggestion that the mechanism of Darwinian selection may apply to replicators of any substance and kind and not just to biological material (Sperber 1996, 102). He wishes, however, to modify Dawkins' explanation of "memes" as cultural replicators. Citing Dawkins' concession that "no copying process is infallible" (Dawkins 1982, 85), that there may be a "'mutational' element" in every copying event Dawkins 1982, 112), Sperber concludes "that representations don't in general replicate in the process of transmission, they transform" (Sperber 1996, 101, 108).

The transformations of cultural descendants are, Sperber maintains, the consequence of "a constructive cognitive process" (Sperber 1996, 101). Sperber maintains, consequently, that "human brains use all the information they are presented with not to copy or synthesize it, but as more or less relevant evidence with which to construct representations of their own" (Sperber 1996, 106, 108). In the summary of Pascal Boyer, mental representations are inferred from cultural input "on the basis of preexisting conceptual structures" Boyer 1994, 284, see also 283–294). Like any cultural representation, then, syncretistic formations are the collective product of cultural input only as that input is processed by human minds (Pinker 1994, 125).

Sperber introduces an "epidemiological" or "contagion" model to characterize the process of cultural transmission and transformation (Sperber 1996, 1–7, 25–27, 57–61). To adapt his discussion of this model to syncretism, religious transmissions could not be the replication of a single parent, of some pure, non-syncretic religious origin, as in the claims of religious orthodoxy, nor even of two parents, as in the common view of religious innovation or syncretistic formation by some sort of blending, "nor of any fixed number of parent tokens, but of an indefinite number

of tokens, some of which have played a much greater 'parental' role than others" (Sperber 1996, 104).

Whereas memes, by Dawkins' genetic analogy, either "succeed or fail to replicate," Sperber's influence model introduces the notion of degree in which differing cultural inputs can be given differing weights (Sperber 1996, 104–105). By this model, "syncretism" would not indicate an either/or but rather a matter of degree, in which degree does not indicate a scale of purity/impurity but the concomitant weights of parental influences. It is this differential weighting of stipulated cultural input that allows the possibility for a mathematical modeling of syncretistic formations. In a recent summary of this possibility, Brian Malley writes that:

> Given a set of concepts with definite semantic content (semantic content fixed by the machinery of our minds), those ideas can combine (according to rules instantiated by the machinery of our minds), to form algorithms that, for some set of problems, produce solutions (Malley 1997, 393; also Malley 1995).

The suggestion of mathematical modeling in the human sciences is not completely novel as Lévi-Strauss has already suggested with his algorithm for the study of myth (Lévi-Strauss 1963 I: 228 and 1973, 249; also Penner 1989, 179).

In the natural sciences, modeling is but a type of generalization, i.e., a way in which to account for the greatest amount of data in terms of the fewest number of principles, an analogy made about things on the basis of a simplified representation. In mathematical modeling the analogy is between a probable set of relationships and their transformation.[14] As Sperber concludes, "[o]nce inputs [and their weights] have been chosen, the outcome of a successful process of replication or synthesis is wholly determined" (Sperber 1996, 106); "[t]he aggregation of probabilistic activation, in different minds, is sufficient to account for the patterns usually described in terms of supra-individual cultural trends" (Boyer 1994, 285).

The problem remains of how criteria for the natural selection of religious tokens that might become "syncretized" are established. (On syncretism and selection, see Martin 1996, 219–222). Sperber argues that:

> Evolutionary pressures are likely to have favoured not only the emergence of specialized mental mechanisms, but also some degree of cognitive efficiency within each of these mechanisms and in their mutual articulation. At any given time, humans perceive more phenomena than they are able to pay attention to, and they have more information stored in memory than they can exploit. Cognitive efficiency involves making the right choices in selecting which available new information to attend to and which available past informa-

14 "Modeling" is itself a problematic endeavor. For a helpful overview of types of modeling, see Hesse 1972, 5:354–359; for a classic discussion, see Freudenthal 1961.

> tion to process it with. The right choices in this respect consist in bringing together input and memory information, the joint processing of which will provide as much cognitive effect as possible for as little mental effort as possible (Sperber 1996, 114).

Sperber argues, in other words, that "[p]ublic productions, from bodily movements, to speech, to buildings, even when they are modeled on some previous productions, are likely to move towards forms where the intended effect can be achieved at minimal cost" (Sperber 1996, 114). Whereas historical analyses would assess "memory information" (see, e.g., from different but relevant perspectives, Hutton 1993 and Schachter 1996), the stipulation of the variable weighting accorded each imputed religious token would effectively determine also the coefficient of selectivity in any mathematical modeling of religious syncretism.

Although the influence model treats "replication in cultural transmission not as the norm but as a limiting case" (Sperber 1996, 106, 118), the meme and the influence models nevertheless share some commonalities. As enumerated by Sperber:

> Both involve an idea of competition. Both define a measure of success, in terms of the number of descendants in the one case, in terms of the degree and spread of influence in the other case. Both predict that the most successful items will dominate the culture, and that the culture will evolve as a result of differences in success among competing items.
>
> Both...see human organisms as agents of replication or synthesis, with little or no individual contribution to the process of which they are the locus...[And for both] mental representations involved in cultural transmission never contain more information than the inputs they are supposed to represent or synthesize (Sperber 1995, 105–106).

Apart from intentional syncretisms, such as that attributed to Mani (Burkitt 1925, 71; Jonas, 1963, 207–208; Rudolph 1983, 334), or that of Apuleius, whose fictive, neo-Platonic "Prayer to Isis" (*Met.* xi), is often cited as the *locus classicus* for religious syncretism, (*OCD* 1970, 1029), both conclude that cultural formations, such as religious syncretisms, represent sets of naturally selected, transmitted tokens.[15]

The analogy of cultural transmission to evolutionary biology suggests at least a plausible explanation for syncretistic formations alternative to common assumptions of random or unstipulated cultural blendings redundantly replicated in historical description. It not only challenges a bias towards origins by substituting a genealogical model, but it also suggests that all religious transmission is syncretistic in the sense of a selection and transformation of a surfeit of available cultural information, especially as occasioned by cultural contact and pluralism (Martin 1996,

15 Intentional syncretisms, understood and studied as such, may offer interesting insights into the formation of syncretisms through natural selection.

220), in which transformation is the consequence of a constructive cognitive process operating as a constraint rather than as a norm.

As transformed religious representations, syncretisms do not name religious corruption but religious innovation (See Williams *et al.* 1992 for discussions of religious innovation). In this sense, syncretisms, religious formations whose genealogies are especially apparent, become paradigms for all religious formations rather than the problematic of a particular type of religious formation.

iii

It might be argued that the conclusions here proffered from the perspective of cognitive research—namely that religious syncretism names a genealogical problem which eschews normative points of reference, that syncretistic formation is identical with any religious transmission, and that transmission is always transformation—are trivial (and anti-Protestant besides) in that these conclusions have been arrived at previously on purely historical or anthropological grounds. These earlier conclusions seem, however, to have fallen on deaf ears. "Syncretism" still tends to be used with reference to some norm to designate corrupted or impure religious phenomena and to be used, as such, as an explanatory category rather than as a set of transformed data to be explained. The appeal to cognitive science, on the other hand, is an appeal to theory against such vestigial theologisms in our field.

The year after Robert Baird questioned the descriptive or theoretical significance of the category "syncretism," Hans Penner and Ed Yonan posed the question: "is a science of religion possible"? They concluded that "without valid definitions and theories," it is not (Penner and Yonan 1972, 133). And yet, explicit analyses defining and explaining such widely employed categories as "religious syncretism" remain as rare today as they were twenty-five years ago (Penner and Yonan 1972, 107). The theoretical identification of cognitive principles can not only establish the constraints upon such historical formations as religious syncretisms but also an analytical architecture for their historical explanation. The proposal for a formulaic formulation of the rules for such systemic formations is, after all, but a proposal for making a kind of scholarly generalization, the validity of which may tested. In this way, we might indeed take a step away from normative concerns and towards a science of religion.

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6. Comparison

It long has been recognized that "[c]omparisouns doon offte gret greuaunce" (Lydgate 1430? iii, 1. 2188). And yet, comparison is so common in the modern study of religion that "comparative religion" is often used to designate the field itself. The modern field of comparative religion was born, like that of anthropology, largely of the encounters with other cultures consequent upon seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western exploration and colonialism. Whereas anthropologists, however, have consistently if inconclusively reflected upon the numerous theoretical and methodological issues incumbent upon comparing data cross-culturally (Lawson and McCauley 1993; see Poole 1986 for a recent consideration of issues focusing on the comparison of religion from an anthropological perspective), virtually no such sustained attention has been given comparison by scholars of religion (the exception being the work of J. Z. Smith 1978; 1982; 1987; 1990). When the issue of comparison is attended to, it is usually as a question of method. Since method is dependent, however, on "the theory that shapes one's problematic" (McCutcheon 1997, 9), the following will emphasize the theoretical issues concerning comparison, discuss how these issues have been dealt with in the study of religion, and conclude with a brief view of prospects.[16]

Comparison

Human beings, it is argued, observe and enumerate, often in great detail, various aspects of their environment. They then compare these data and group or classify them (Lt: *gener*, *genus* = class) according to generalizations they make about the similarities, and consequently the differences, among them (Lt: *comparare*) (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 10). These acts of comparison and generalization represent fundamental ways in which human minds order the world (Schacter 1996, 52, 55). Considerations of data in terms of such constructed categories, for example, enable previous "knowledge about similar objects" to be applied to all newly perceived entities (Pinker 1997, 12). The question, then, is not whether to compare but how best to understand and effectively to go about this task (Lawson 1996, 32).

Comparative generalizations represent attempts to account for the greatest amount of data in terms of the fewest number of principles. Generally, only a single principle is assumed in their construction (Brody 1967, 60). Such a principle might

16 Portions of the following have been taken from arguments and observations first suggested in Martin 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2000a, and 2000b.

predict, for example, that generalizations about similarities admit more shared data and fewer nonshared data than those about dissimilarities (Pinker 1997, 13). But what constitutes "similarity"? This judgment raises further questions of whether the principle whereby data is admitted to a common class is, for example, that of homology or of analogy. Homologies are understood by biologists as similarities produced by descent from common ancestors whereas analogies are similarities produced in some other way (Saler 1993, 174–177). Animals, for example, may be grouped into taxa that presume natural relationships by genealogy but also into "guilds," into herbivores, carnivores or omnivores, according to analogous ways of obtaining food. Depending upon the explanatory principle employed, "chimpanzees and gorillas are similar category-mates or as different as people and cows" (Pinker 1997, 128). The principle or principles of generalization, in other words, must be explained if they are to be accorded any intellectual integrity.

Different social groups pay attention in varying degrees of intensity to different environmental details. Consequently, every society produces principles of generalizations which are common only to that group (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 2, 10). Such "common sense" may be defined, with Giambattista Vico, as "judgment without reflection, shared" by a particular social group (Vico 1948 [1744], 142). The commonsensical aggregate of generalizations included in any group's "circle of knowledge" constitutes its "encyclopedia," indeed, its "encyclopedia of comparative knowledge" (Berger 1967, 21). When observers encounter the data of others, data that often appear novel in that they do not fit the conceptual or interpretative categories of the observer, they tend to make generalizations about this data based upon their own commonsensical encyclopedia.

Familiarity, indeed superiority, is generally assumed of one's own encyclopedia. As the fifth-century B.C.E. historian Herodotus already recognized:

> if it were proposed to all peoples to choose which seemed best of all customs, each, after examination made, would place their own first; so well is each persuaded that their own are by far the best (Hdt. 3. 38).

Generalizations about one's past are, as in the case of individual memory (Schacter 1996, 26), especially accorded familiarity. However, recent historiographical theory, influenced by ethnography, has emphasized that the character of the past is also "other" with respect to the historian/observer (Pocock 1962; Silk 1987). In other words, neither the customs of contemporary China, for example, nor those of the Western middle ages accord with a modern Western observers' commonsense data and rules for classifying these data. Consequently, simplistic attempts at a description of others often represent, as do naïve historiographies, a reduction of the

data of others to the generalizations/categories of the observer, creating, thereby a perception of similarities where none exist.

In addition to commonsense generalizations, which are based on a sort of "soaking up of [cultural] correlations among properties" (Pinker 1997, 127), generalizations may be based on the ideological commitments of special interest groups. Such propagated views, be they political, religious, moral, etc., need not necessarily be false and may, indeed, represent an evaluative response to an uncritical social consensus (Merton 1968, 160, 563). Nevertheless, the self-interested basis of such views ensures a perspective on others, whether positive or negative, that finally is as unreflective as the commonsense generalizations of which it is initially so critical. In fact, if successful, such propaganda may itself achieve over time the status of common sense.

In contrast to common sense, which may well be characterized by stereotypes, or to propaganda, which is often associated with ideological fictions, effective generalization requires the formal and critical considerations that may be afforded by theoretical reflection. As M. I. Finley concluded of historical generalizations, one of the most common types of generalization in the human sciences alongside comparison, unexamined assumptions "may impose an unexplained or unjustified organization of the subject matter to be presented and may bring in their wake other unexamined assumptions or generalizations" (Gottschalk 1963, 197).

Theoretical generalizations define "categories in terms of rules that apply to them, and that treat all the members of the category equally" (Pinker 1997, 127)—in our context, the rules of posited similarity (Pinker 1997, 309). Louis Gottschalk's prescription for the place of theory in historiography suffices for comparison as well. Theory, he writes, is the "attempt to find in...[the] subject matter a *basis* for comparison, classification, interpretation, or generalization" (Gottschalk 1963, *v*, emphasis added). Theory, in other words, allows us "to rise above mere similarity and reach conclusions based on explanations" that are extrinsic to and different from the subject matter (Pinker 1997, 127; Poole 1986, 413; Gopnik and Wellman 1994, 260). Although historiographical generalizations are contingent upon a specific context or tradition whereas comparative generalizations are not so constrained, the explanatory requirement is the same for both: to possess intellectual efficacy, generalizations must formulated as "systematically related sets of empirically testable deductive hypotheses" (McCutcheon 1997, 9).

Clearly the human sciences cannot evaluate their theories in ways appropriate to those of the natural sciences. Unlike the invariable laws of nature sought by the natural sciences, however, the human sciences *can* attempt to differentiate between *valid* and *invalid* generalizations. The conclusions of historical study together with those of anthropological research provide sufficient measure against which such

generalizations, formulated as hypotheses, may be tested. Eric Hobsbawm offers the example of "Hindu zealots" who:

> destroyed a mosque in Aodhya, ostensibly on the [propagandistic] grounds that the mosque had been imposed by the Muslim Moghul conquerer Barbur on the Hindus in a particularly sacred location which marked the birthplace of the god Rama.

However, Indian historians have demonstrated:

> (a) that nobody until the nineteenth century had suggested that Aodhya was the birthplace of Rama and (b) that the mosque was almost certainly not built in the time of Babur (Hobsbawm 1997, 6).

Thus, as Gottschalk concludes, generalizations must conform "at least...to all the known facts" as well as "to certain general standards and tests—of human behavior, of logical antecedents and consequences, of statistical or mass trends" (Gottschalk 1963, *vi*; see Hobsbawm 1997, 6). If deemed valid, hypotheses can be held to be explanatory or causal and are differentiated, thereby, from both common sense and propaganda (Poole 1986, 413; McCutcheon 1997, 9). As such, a number of leading members of the International Association for the History of Religions have endorsed the proposition that "Comparative Religion" can make "*scientifically legitimate* generalizations concerning the nature and function of religion" (Schimmel 1960, 236).[17]

Comparing religions

"Religion," in an oft-cited observation by Jonathan Z. Smith, is a creation of the scholar's "imaginative acts of comparison and generalization" (J. Z. Smith 1982, xi). Some students of religion have appropriated from this statement support for idiosyncratic projects of "imagining religion" (indeed, the title of Smith's volume from which this prefatory line is taken); "I will not Reason and Compare:" the poet has said, "my business is to Create" (Blake 1997, f. 10, l. 21). Any study of religion in the absence of comparison and reasoned generalization is, however, but a commonsensical or propagandistic reiteration of itself, however creatively it may be formu-

17 Statement on the "basic minimum presuppositions" for the study of religion, signed by seventeen scholars at the Xth Congress of the International Association for the Study of Religions, Marburg, 1960.

lated and however this creation may be ornamented with the conventions of scholarship. In the conclusion of Poole the encapsulation of any

> analysis within a single religious system—and thus within the semantic networks of the religion's own terms, categories, and understandings—entangles the analysis with the very discourse it seeks to interpret and explain (Poole 1986, 413).

Too few scholars have heeded Smith's admonition that "imaginative acts of comparison and generalization" are, in his recommendation, not for poetic fabrications but for "analytic purposes" and are subject, thereby, to scientific (i.e., *wissenschaftliche*, "academic" or "theoretical") constraints (J. Z. Smith 1982, xi).

Students of religion first attempted to apply scientific principles to the comparison of religions in the latter part of the nineteenth century. These early proponents of comparative studies based their generalizations on the "raw material" of "empirical data" provided them by the historical and philological studies of particular religious traditions (Müller 1871, 5; Jastrow [1901] 1981, 21; Jordan 1905, 9–10), a view that still has currency (Sharpe 1987, 578). Theoretical reservations about nineteenth-century positivistic claims to the veracity of factual objectivity aside, the question remains about what exactly constitutes the evidentiary data of religion that historians and philologists might amass? Given that differing cultures have produced differing "religious" data, what, in other words, are the units of comparison to be? Selected *aspects* of what the observer considers to be religious data (Poole 1986, 414)? Comparisons have been made, for example, of religious ideas, their teachings or beliefs; they have been made of religious symbols or of religious experiences (on "intellectualist," "symbolist" and "emotivist" theories of religion which identify these differing classes of data, see already Marett 1932, 1). Is there some *essential* aspect of these data that identifies them as religious and differentiates them, thereby, from those of analogous forms of human behavior? In other words, are such data to be construed as independent variables which may exert causal influences upon other cultural formations or as variables dependent upon other social and cultural factors (Krymkowski and Martin 1998)? Or perhaps the data of religion should be situated in and comparison made of entire religious systems? But, again, what constitutes a "religious" system and in what sense are entire systems comparable when by definition they are "different"? Stipulations of which data, or which sets of data, to compare and upon which generalizations might subsequently be made are not, in other words, self-evident, even as a consequence of meticulous historical and philological research, but already presume some operative theory of religion.

Further, an understanding of comparison and generalization as an operation following upon the gathering of the evidentiary data of particular religions by his-

torical specialists raises its own theoretical problems. For historical data is the raw material of commonsensical and propagandistic as well as of comparative generalizations (Hobsbawm 1997, 5, 275). Is the observer to notice the similarities or the differences among these data? If similarities, how is their presence to be explained? Are there theories of comparison based upon differences?

Many scholars who have emphasized the *differences* among religious data have been impressed by their particularity, that is, by their socio-cultural contingency and specificity. Accordingly, they have questioned the significance if not the validity of any cross-cultural generalization. Some "postmodernists," for example, understand any attempt at generalization, including theoretical and even scientific generalizations, to be linguistically standardized cultural constructs (Pinker 1997, 308; Hobsbawm 1997, 6). Such well-meant attempts to preserve the integrity of "others" (Hewitt 1996), however, often result simply in a reiteration by paraphrase of what others say of themselves, preserving, thereby, their difference from the generalizations/categories of the observer (Poole 1986, 413; Gopnik and Wellman 1994, 260). Since the categories of such observers are, by this view, not subject to generalization, they remain, consequently, propagandistic. The results tend, therefore, to be similar to those produced by pre- or non-scientific comparativists, namely an evaluation of the "beliefs and practices [of the observer] in relation to those of other peoples and races" (James 1961, 15). So understood, the comparative project remains a reflexive exercise within the religious context of the observer, a limitation such views share with earlier comparative practices informed by religious apologetics.

While differences among particular data may well be important to specialists, they may have but minor significance for the generalizations of comparativists. One of the more interesting examples of a theoretical model of comparison based on difference rather than resemblance is Lévi-Strauss' attempt to establish the meaning of myths in terms of a differential, oppositional logic (Penner 1989, 179). Lévi-Strauss nevertheless argues that: "[i]t is through the properties common to all thought that we can most easily begin to understand forms of thought which seem very strange to us" (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 10). Whereas comparison requires, in other words, "the postulation of difference as the grounds of its being interesting," it is the similarities that make it possible (J. Z. Smith 1982, 35; Poole 1986, 417); and it is the perception—or conception—of similarities that has dominated the comparative agenda (J. Z. Smith 1982, 21). But how might the presence of "properties common to" religion be explained?

An early view of similarity among religions was based on the assumption that the religious data of others are simply variations upon those of the observer and, consequently, these data may simply be identified. This view can be traced from the *interpretatio Graeca* or *Romana* of Western antiquity (the term is Tacitus',

Germ. 43.4). Herodotus, for example, identified Egyptian deities with those of his own Greek deities (Hdt. 2.42, 144) and averred that the Thracians "worship no gods but [the Greek] Ares, Dionysus and Artemis" (Hdt. 5.7). His synthesis was guided, of course, by his own Greek theological categories, i.e., the mythological encyclopedia of Homer and Hesiod (Hdt. 2.53).

Modern comparativists, more influenced by models of scientific generalization than of religious synthesis, seek theoretical explanations for perceived similarities among the diversity of religious data. Such theoretically formulated explanations have most often attempted to establish a homologous basis for these similarities either by scholarly accounts of historical processes of diffusion or contact or, similar to folk psychology, by assuming some "underlying constitution" (Pinker 1997, 324).

Historical diffusion is the view that families of religion share a common genealogy. Max Müller, for example, modeled his proposal for a "scientific study of religion" on that of comparative philology which, at the time, was intent upon tracing the historical diffusion and development of Indo-Aryan languages (Müller 1871). Analogously, many scholars sought to explain the homologies they perceived among religious data as traces of primitive religious origins that had survived among the "more developed religious" traditions. This view of religious "survivals" gained theoretical support from evolutionary theories borrowed from biology and illegitimately adapted to social development (J. Z. Smith 1982, 24). On the other hand, attempts have been made to explain religious similarities by historical contact. According to this "syncretistic" view, some aspects of an originally autonomous religious tradition were influenced by or became blended with (or were corrupted by) those of one or more others as the consequence of cultural contact, whether through conquest, through commerce, or through the centrifugal tendencies of political development.

Theories of diffusion and contact both assume some view of an original religiosity from which the various historical religions either diverged or converged. Such genealogical views based upon origination are unhelpful, however, since such origins are finally unavailable to historical or anthropological research and, consequently, tend simply to be retrodictions of contemporary imaginings, indefensibly based, for example, on stereotypical assumptions about primordial survivals identified from among contemporary "primitive" peoples.

The dominant rationale to explain apparent similarities among the various religions when historical diffusion or contact cannot be demonstrated or assumed has been the positing of some kind of "primordial tradition" or of some sort of "psychic unity of mankind" from which religious themes or motifs derive (Faivre 1998, 120; J. Z. Smith 1982, 26). Such homologous patterns as "sky gods," "solar worship," "lunar deities," "water symbolism," "sacred stones," "earth and women," "vegetation rites," etc. (Eliade 1953, "Contents" see van der Leeuw 1938) purportedly "re-

veal themselves" through a comparison of the multiplicity of historical religious expressions and practices (Eliade 1964, xiv-xix). The problem with such archetypal or morphological catalogues of religious themes, apart from the questionable assumption about their source, is, of course, their discounting of any historical and cultural significance. Rather, the amassing of such acontextual data has been more often in service to the culturally shaped, i.e., commonsensical or propagandistic, agenda of the comparativist. Thus, the "recurrent" themes have tended to be derived from religious traditions of the Western scholar, the autonomous character attributed "the sacred," for example.

Comparativists who explain similarities among the diversity of religious data in terms of homologies tend to presume some essential "religiosity" common to these data. This presumption has led some of their number to propose, consequently, an eventual synthesis of the world's "great" religions based on a recovery of the commonalities they "discover" among them. Irenic pursuits of comparative religion have resulted in such generic religious quests as the founding of "theosophy" in the nineteenth century (e.g., Blavatsky 1889) and the construction of "world theologies" in the twentieth (e.g., W. C. Smith 1981; Reat and Perry 1991; Grünschloß 1994). Even Max Müller, one of the first to argue a scientific character for the comparative study of religion, anticipated a new religion...for the whole world...firmly founded on a belief on the One God, the same in the Vedas, the same in the Old, the same in the New Testament, the same in the Korân, the same also in the hearts of those who have no longer any Vedas or Upanishads or any Sacred Books whatever between themselves and their God (Müller 1884, 80–81). This goal of seeing in the gods of differing religions "nothing but names of what [is] beyond all names" is, Müller concluded, "[o]ne of the many lessons" which a comparative study of the historical religions may teach us (Müller 1880, 363–364).

At best, the perception of similarities among religious data remains an unexplained recognition of intuitive familiarities observers tend to find in traditions different from their own (Pinker 1997, 324; Malley 1997, 389). "Even the barbarians have gods," Aristophanes assured his fifth-century B.C.E. Greek audience (Ar. *Av.* 1525). Rather than portending a reduction to some essential "religiosity," however, such recognitions might better be understood as *analogies* among the complexities of historical and cultural data. Jonathan Z. Smith, for example, has argued that religious similarities may be understood as the consequence of "analogical processes, responding to parallel kinds of religious situations" in a shared, historically constituted cultural field (J. Z. Smith 1990, 112–113). The question remains, however, how to explain perceived *cross-cultural* analogies, should the validity of such generalizations be admitted.

An approach alternative to the comparison of religions based upon generalizations about the data of particular religious traditions would be a theoretical devel-

opment at the outset of general categories and/or formal frameworks of religion (Wiebe 1996). Apart from the recognition that what counts as religious data is itself a theoretical question, the quandary remains that an accumulation of even more data will not satisfy questions associated with comparison. Since "religion," like "literature," "philosophy," "history," etc., is but a discursive formation with its own history and historically constituted set of rules (Foucault 1972, 22, 38), rules for such generalizations might well be formulated according to scientific principles which are not contingent upon any one culture.

An example of theoretically constructed generalizations that might provide categories adequate for comparison is the "ideal types" first proposed by Max Weber (Weber 1946, 323–324). Although these "logically precise conceptions," as employed by Weber, tended to be modelled on Western religions, e.g., "gods", "priests," "prophets," "salvation religions," "ethics" (Weber 1963, Contents), such theoretically formulated categories need not *in principle* conform to any specific cultural classification system (Gerth and Mills 1946, 59–60). A second example of theoretically constructed generalizations is modeled upon contemporary linguistics which has recognized, since the work of Saussure at the beginning of the century, a "constant data" that make up the multiplicity of human languages and that constitute a basis for comparison while still respecting the differences among the various languages (Saussure 1966, 192–193).

Formal, theoretically constructed generalizations about religion can finally be filled in or amplified with the data of particular religious traditions, data that establish each and every religious system as a unique system of meaning for its particular participants and practitioners. Such theoretically formulated generalizations about religion would, of course, also define the data of religion, ensuring thereby the evidentiary confirmation of that theory. Nevertheless, such an approach would seem to offer the optimum possibility for diminishing culturally specific orientations in comparative research.

Prospects

Although the scientific comparison of religions has made remarkable progress since its nineteenth-century origins, metaphysical, i.e., theological, concerns with which comparisons of religions have been implicated in Western culture since antiquity (Arist. *Metaph.* $1026^{a}19$; see_$1064^{b}3$) continue to infect generalizations about religion. The term "metaphysics" was first employed by Hellenistic commentators on the untitled group of texts Aristotle wrote "after those he wrote on nature" (*meta ta physika*). Medieval philosophers, however, imputed to "*meta*" a "philosophical" rather than its simple prepositional meaning, transforming its temporal into a tran-

scendental sense (Hancock 1967, 289). Since the Enlightenment, however, epistemology in the human sciences has been reverting from the metaphysical to the physical sciences. Consequently, "naturalistic theories" have been defined for the study of religion simply as those whose "commitments" are no "different from the assumptions one might use to understand and explain other realms of culture" (Preus 1987, x). The best prospect for "scientifically legitimate generalizations" about religions would seem to rest, consequently, in the abandonment of theological presumptions about and concerns with ahistorical origins and essences and an acceptance of naturalistic theories, a direction that provides the basis for what has been loosely designated the "new comparativism" (Martin 1996).

Like scientific generalizations generally, naturalistic theories of religion are based upon theoretical reductions (Poole 1986, 417) and, consequently, understand religion primarily as a dependent variable. Some of these theories of religion suggest a developmental homology between biological patterns of behavior and culturally "refined" religious practices and suggest these biological substructures as the formal basis for comparison (Burkert 1996). These theories must remain vigilant, however, against a return to earlier views of a social evolution from the "primitive" to the "civilized" (Harris 1979, 139). A second significant development for developing a naturalistic theory for comparing religions is the implications of cognitive psychology. The ultimate, while still distant, goal of cognitive psychology is a global explanation and mapping of the physical structure of the human mind and how it operates. In contrast to biologically based theories of phylogenetic adaption, the mental structures being identified by cognitive psychologists are understood as trans-historical as well as cross-cultural constraints upon the production of human cultures, including their religions (Lawson and McCauley 1990; Boyer 1994; Sperber 1996). The identification of these common mental constraints promises to provide, therefore, a non-ethnocentric framework for analogical religious constructs.

Biologically based theories of cultural production have led to a consideration of the social dynamic of "world construction" without yet offering a clear theoretical explanation for these social structures. What we regard as "religion" is fundamentally a social reality in which socially defined "sacred orders" maintain an "inhabited program of highlighted or bounded categories" for various social units. Whether the social construction of religion is understood as cultural adaptations of biology (Boyer 1990, Burkert 1996) or as the consequence of a domain-specific competence of the human mind (Hirschfeld 1994), such "religious worlds" can offer "a matrix" for "comparative inquiry" that "shows common, analogical factors in human behavior," on the one hand, and establishes "a standard against which cultural differences may be highlighted," on the other (see Luckmann 1967; Paden

1996). Consequently, a comparative study of religion requires also cross-culturally valid theories of social formation and maintenance.

Scholars in the traditions of Durkheim, Marx and Weber have all produced significant social theories of religion. Although only Weber concerned himself specifically with issues of comparison, theories produced by the Durkheimian and Marxist traditions also have clear cross-cultural implications. Since the work of W. Robertson Smith, for example, a major influence on that of Durkheim, anthropologists have identified but two types of social systems: "kinship" and "kingship" (W. R. Smith 1972 [1889], Ch. 2). "Kinship societies" may be defined as those in which "[e]very human being, without choice on his own part, but simply in virtue of his birth and upbringing, becomes a member of" (W. R. Smith 1972 [1889], 29). Membership in these "natural societies," a notion that may be traced from Aristotle (*Pol.* I. 1.4–6), may be augmented by kin recruitment, e. g., adoption, and kin alliances, e. g., marriage (Martin 1997a; 1997b). By contrast, "kingship" may be defined as a transformation of kinship groups into "an aristocracy of the more powerful kins" with a consequent consolidation of power (W. R. Smith 1972 [1889], 73). Historical societies and their correlative religious forms represent, of course, sundry incremental variations between these two "ideal" types of social formation. Yet, such universal patterns of social formation and organization suggest the possibilities inherent in such theories for comparative study.

Naturalistic theories raise once again the Enlightenment proposal of human universals but without the metaphysical/theological assumptions (Brown 1991). As a basis for a comparative study of religion, such theories are promising. And yet, they remain provisional; none have yet been developed into a complete theory for a competent comparing of religions that has been fully "tested" against the cross-cultural and historical data. By paying attention, however, to the role that human biology, minds and social organization play in the production and constraint of cultural forms and expression, such empirical "mappings" of the architecture of human behavior and thought promise to contribute not only to our knowledge of the ubiquity of religion in human culture and its persistence in human history but to suggest also a formal framework of mental and behavioral constraints upon which might be constructed a theoretical explanation for the comparative enterprise that is so central to the way in which human beings organize their world and to academic generalizations alike.

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7. Comparativism and Sociobiological Theory

While the "academic study of religion" is often considered to be synonymous with "comparative religion," little attention has been given by scholars of religion to theories of comparison. When scholars of religion turn to the social sciences, as they often do in matters of theory, they find the situation with respect to comparison is little better. Recent attention to such theoretical reflections on comparative methods among some social scientists have, however, reopened the question of "human universals," themes familiar to scholars of religion from the phenomenology of religions but increasingly eschewed by them as ahistorical, at best, and theologically shaped, at worst. If, however, comparative studies are to avoid metaphysical musings and ethnocentric excesses, they might best proceed on the theoretical basis of natural, species-specific characteristics of human beings and demonstrate the relationships among the biological and cognitive constraints on human beings, on the one hand, and their social and historical constructions, on the other.

Whatever else "religion" may be, it is a social fact and human sociality seems to be one "universal" characteristic of human beings about which there seems to be some consensus among representatives of the various sciences. This paper looks at some of the biological and cognitive explanations proposed for human sociality, outlines a social—and parallel religious—typology based on such explanations, and suggests in a preliminary way a "test" for this typological hypothesis against ethnographic/historical data from two ancient but disparate cultures, China and Greece.

i

A little over a decade ago, participants in a conference on theory and method, held in Warsaw and sponsored by the Polish Society for the Science of Religions and the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), concluded that the history of religions might well be reconceived as "a human and cultural science" in which "religion" would be understood "as a reality which interconnects social activities " Consequently, analyses of "social processes which are correlative with religious phenomena would require the evaluation and use of innovative social theories and models...Whether such a methodological orientation" would "prove fruitful" was to "be judged in the context of future research" (Tyloch 1990, 8). Although historians of religion have increasingly turned towards the social sciences for theoretical and methodological insights, especially to anthropology and the cognitive sciences, any theoretical basis for a compara-

tive method remains, with a few notable exceptions (e. g., William E. Paden, Benson Saler, Jonathan Z. Smith) elusive, still bound largely to romantic but finally ethnocentric generalizations of hermeneutic affirmation, a tradition seriously challenged only by the penetrating but particularistic insights of postmodernist parochialism.

The general absence of a theoretical basis for comparativism among historians of religions is not surprising given the absence of much attention to comparative research among the social sciences to which the Warsaw conference recommended attention. Two years prior to that Conference, Melvin Kohn, the president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), wrote in the announcement of the theme for the 1988 ASA annual convention that:

> The time has long passed, if it ever existed, when it is sensible to generalize from findings based on studies done entirely within the United States, without asking whether our findings are descriptive only of the U.S. or would apply as well to other developed countries, to other Western countries, to other capitalist countries, to other countries in general. (Kohn 1989, 18)

And Stefan Nowak, in his contribution to the volume resulting from responses to the theme of that ASA convention, noted an essential "gap" between those comparative social studies which have been produced and the theoretical enterprise. The explanatory principles of social theory, he concluded, were "intended by the founding fathers of sociology to be valid for broad spaciotemporal regions of the world." For many of the "classical" sociologists, consequently, the call for "'comparative' sociological study would sound redundant" (Nowak 1989, 34). Kohn's and Nowak's observation that little or no attention has been given to the formulation and testing of social theories based explicitly upon comparative research and which might produce generalizations valid for "mankind in general" (Nowak 1989, 34) remains today largely unaddressed.[18]

The notion of social scientific generalizations based explicitly upon comparative studies and theoretically formulated as more or less valid for "mankind in

18 A quick survey of articles published in *JSSR* since Kohn's appeal exemplifies his concern about the "parochial" character of research in the United States in social-scientific studies of religion (Kohn 1989, 17–20). Although a number of studies on aspects of other cultures have been published in this journal during the last decade, only three articles might be described as cross-national (van Driel-van Belzen 1990; Campbell-Curtis 1994; Stark 1997) and only two articles and one "research note" are explicitly based on cross-cultural research (Ponton-Gorsuch 1988; McClenon 1988; H. Johnston 1989). This relative dearth of published comparative research in the study of religion found relief only in the publication in 1998 of an issue of *JSSR* addressing the theme of the 1997 meeting of SSSR, "Religious Borderlands," especially a section on "Religion in Global Perspective."

general" poses the issue of "human universals," i.e., behaviors or patterns of behavior common to the species *Homo sapiens*. In his survey of research on this theme, published a year after that of the proceedings of the IAHR conference in Warsaw, Donald Brown concluded that American anthropology, at least, has been dominated by a view of culture as an arbitrary, locally constructed *sui generis* phenomenon that is irreducible to other determinants of human behavior such as biology or psychology (Brown 1991, 6, 56, 63 n. 5, 71, 144) and that this view has precluded much research on "human universals" as a basis for comparative theorizing. By contrast, a "comparative religion" has traditionally been constructed precisely on the assumption that "religion" *is* an irreducible, *sui generis* phenomenon (McCutcheon 1997). The difference is that "comparative religion" has been based on theologizing suppositions about a universal sacrality (Martin 2000a, 2000b) whereas anthropology has been based on historistic assumptions concerning the unique character of every human society (Brown 1991, 5).[19] Perhaps, in consequence of the "Concluding Statement" of the IAHR Warsaw conference, students of religion might benefit from social-scientific expertise in the formulation of testable theories while at the same time challenging social scientists to base their social theories on comparative research and to test their validity, thereby, for "mankind in general."

ii

One "universal" characteristic of human beings and, consequently, of their religiosity, about which there seems to be some consensus among representatives of the various sciences and which I should like to explore here is "sociality" (Wilson 1975, 16–18; Carrithers 1992, esp. 1, 55–75; for religion, Paden 1998, 2000). I define sociality, with Michael Carrithers, as "an inherited ['capacity for complex social behaviour']...established through the force of natural selection" (Carrithers 1992, 34, 38). As we all now know, the DNA of any two humans is 99% identical, all of which is constituted by various combinations of but four chemical units. How do you get from such simplicity to the complexity of the human brain, and from the complexity of individual brains to the diversity of social relationships in which individual minds are deployed? The answer, according to one commentator, is fairly easy: "[y]ou just build one layer of complexity on top of

19 Social scientists who specialize in the study of religion often fall into the same sort of theologized *sui generis* assumptions about religion as do historians of religion (Krymkowski-Martin 1998). This is not surprising given their proclivity to generalization based primarily if not solely on research in the American (or Western) context.

another until you have what you need" (Wade 2000).[20] Whether the inherited character of the human social imperative and its consequent complexity might better be explained by the structure of the human brain itself, as suggested by Lévi-Strauss; as a domain-specific competency of human cognition, as argued by Lawrence Hirschfeld (1989, 1994); as cultural elaborations of biology, as suggested by Walter Burkert (1996); or on the basis of the "reciprocal altruism" posited as a genetically encoded "default" behavior—which might offer an explanation for the other three (Wright 1994, 188–209)—the problem of accounting for the diversity of human sociality, and thus of religions, remains.

W. Robertson Smith was perhaps the first comparativist to recognize that religion must be accounted for by its social nature (Kardiner-Preble 1961, 73, n. 2). "Every human being," Smith averred, "without choice on his own part, but simply in virtue of his birth and upbringing, becomes a member of...a *natural society*" (Smith 1889, 29)—whatever any given society might hold to constitute "natural" (Fox 1967, 39–41). In his classic article on "The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior," W.D. Hamilton demonstrated mathematically that the mere coming together of the sexes and parental care is underdeterminative for the social organization of any species (Hamilton 1964, 1). "[F]or a gene to receive positive selection," he concluded:

> it is not necessarily enough that it should increase the fitness of its bearer above the average if this tends to be done at the heavy expense of related individuals, because relatives, on account of their common ancestry, tend to carry replicas of the same gene; and conversely...a gene may receive positive selection even though disadvantageous to its bearers if it causes them to confer sufficiently large advantages on relatives (Hamilton 1964, 17).

In other words, Hamilton's argument stipulated that such notions as Smith's "natural society," defined anthropologically by "birth and upbringing," might better be explained in terms of a larger kinship group defined by "inclusive fitness," i.e., a subordination of the individual to the survival of those relatives who share many of the individual's genes.[21]

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20 The issue of explaining cultural complexity on the basis of simplicity has been addressed on the level of human cognition by Lawson and McCauley 1990.

21 Anthropologists who concern themselves with such matters typically include categories of kinship on their provisional list of human universals (e.g., the classic article by Murdock 1945; for a recognition of human universals for theories of religion, see Burkert 1996, 4). Hirschfeld has concluded that kinship claims themselves "represent a domain-specific conceptual array with innately guided unique conditions of acquisition and an enriched initial state" (Hirschfeld 1989, 565).

While kin recognition clearly has a "natural" basis, it is worth emphasizing that the criteria for kin selection among humans are not restricted to biology—which is, of course, a very modern system of knowledge that, indeed, "demonstrates and quantifies the kinship of all life on Earth" (Park 2000, 81). Rather, what humans consider kinship refers more to relationships and differentiations that are socially constructed and defined (Fox 1967, 39), as the political instance of kin alliances through marriage and the juridical case of kin recruitment through adoption make clear (for a good general discussion of kinship issues, with bibliography, see Fox 1967). As Smith already put it, "[t]he idea that kinship is not purely an affair of birth, but may be acquired, has quite fallen out of our circle of ideas" (Smith 1889, 273). In the more recent summary of Eric Wolf, "[p]atterns of kinship may be used to expand the scope of social and ideological linkages, and such linkages may become major operative factors in the jural and political realm" (E. Wolf 1997, 89). Although largely neglected by Smith (and Wolf), the preeminent technique for the acquisition of kin apart from birth and marriage is adoption (but see Smith 1885, 52–54). This adoptive strategy of kin recruitment could be extended not only to sons (and daughters) but to ancestors, including heroes and deities as well; and commemoration of the ancestors held in common and linked to the present by genealogical narratives of descent, establishes the collective identity for a particular group and provides their *raison d'être* (for the relationship between kinship and society/culture, see also the classic studies of Coulanges 1979 [1873], 40–116 and Durkheim 1965 [1915], esp. 309–333). Adoptive subordination establishes fictive kin groups that have nothing to do, of course, with the survival of genes but rather with the survival of "memes."

In his now classic 1976 study of "the selfish gene," Richard Dawkins (1989) coined the term "meme" to name units of cultural transmission which, he suggests, might be understood as "analogous to genetic transmission" (Dawkins 1989, 192). "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so," he suggests, "memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins 1989, 192).[22] The subordina-

22 Dawkins suggests that the transmission of memes might actually be "realized physically... as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men": "When you plant a fertile meme in...[another's] mind you literally parasitize...[that] brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell" (Dawkins 1976, 192). As Dawkins added in the new edition of his work: "If memes in brains are analogous to genes they must be self-replicating brain structures, actual patterns of neuronal wiring-up that reconstitute themselves in one brain after another" (Dawkins 1989, 323).

tion of the individual to a group that shares many of the same memes is a social principle of inclusive fitness that governs rules of social formation and maintenance and that provides a "powerful force of social cohesion" often expressed as kinship (Park 2000, 36; for more recent discussions of memes, see Dennett 1995, 335 – 370, 473 – 476; Brodie 1996; and Sperber 1996, 100 – 108). In the definition of Wolf, such kinship organization involves "(a) symbolic constructs ('filiation/marriage; consanguinity/affinity') that (b) continually places actors, born and recruited, (c) into social relations with one another" (E. Wolf 1997, 91). In addition to societies organized explicitly in terms of kinship claims, e. g., brotherhoods and fraternities, members of memetically constituted kin societies may, of course, imagine themselves in terms of any number of socio-political institutions with which they are familiar: various forms of secret or counter-cultural societies, revived or exotic religious cults, or political alternatives. All tend, however, to retain, in various degrees, kinship claims that differentiate insiders from outsiders, and kinship relations that structure their internal organization.

The significance of kinship societies, whether natural or fictive and however imagined, is heightened by contrast with the emergence of a second type of human social organization—kingship. In Smith's earlier formulation:

> the primitive equality of the tribal system tends in progress of time to transform itself into an aristocracy of the more powerful kins, or of the more powerful families within one kin...[with the consequence that] wealth begins to be unequally distributed (W.R. Smith 1889, 73).

Hamilton's biological explanation for such transformation of the socio-political order involves the advantage to inclusive fitness that would be consequent upon the evolutionary emergence of discrimination between kin and non-kin (Hamilton 1964, 21). This recognition of kin, those who share in the same gene pool, or in the case of fictive kin alliances, the same meme pool, requires the forming of social hierarchies in which kin, natural or fictive, are distinguished from non-kin (creating, thereby, the problem of strangers and orphans), and in which internal rankings emerge in which close kin are distinguished from distant kin, the privileged kin are distinguished from the lesser, senior lines of descent from a common ancestor are distinguished from the junior, "lines rising to prominence" because of demographic oscillations, managements of "alliances, people, or resources," the effects of wars, etc. are distinguished from those in a "state of decline," and in which adopted, initiated, or nuptial newcomers are relegated to the lowest social rank (Hamilton 1964, 23; E. Wolf 1997, 94, 389). Relations of production and those of exchange between non-kin follow as does domination and political power (Carrithers 1992, 49). This tendency towards a biological-

ly based "politicization" of social order is instantiated by examples from the ubiquitous pecking order among chickens to the dominance of alpha males among most social animals (Bekoff 1999) and is a socio-historical reality observable from the beginnings of human history (on hierarchy and religious structure, see Burkert 1996, 80 – 101). It is, in other words, likely that our human ancestors evolved adaptations in response to recurrent problems faced by emergent human societies which included, among other adaptive mechanisms, cognitive "capacities for representing social dominance" (Hirschfeld 1999, 580). This evolutionary possibility for the construction of human social hierarchies has given rise to the "Machiavellian Intelligence Hypothesis" which posits that "advanced cognitive processes...are primarily adaptations to the *special complexities of...social lives* rather than only to nonsocial environmental problems such as finding food" (Whiten 1999, 495; also Byrne-Whiten 1988). Claims to kinship can thus function at two levels, that of the domestic or local group and that of the political order (E. Wolf 1997, 89).

Since, as Michel Foucault has emphasized, all social relationships, whether individual or collective, are relationships of power, the difference between these two "ideal types" of social organization might be formulated in terms of a differing distribution of power (Sheridan 1980, 183 – 185; Sagan 1985, 236, 240). Whereas power in kinship groups is disseminated more or less equally throughout the society with kin ordering establishing the upper limits of internal differentiation (E. Wolf 1997, 94), kingships are characterized by an escalating consolidation of power; and the one tends to follow upon the other. Such consolidations of power represent a challenge to local distributions of power even as the continuing existence of local power threatens that of ascendant authority. When a particular distribution of power or a proposal for a particular distribution of power is legitimated by claims to the authority of some superhuman referent, then we may speak of "religion" as a taxon formally differentiated from other taxa such as politics or economics with their own claims to the legitimating authority of historically constituted power, whether or not such taxa are actually differentiated in any given social domain. Although it is important to understand how and why various types of social organization have, in different historical cases, developed and extended their domains of power (E. Wolf 1997, ix), I am suggesting a sociological extension of biological or anthropological uses of "kinship" as a universal idiom or "ideal type" of socio-political, including religious, organization, that stands as an alternative to that of "kingship."

If comparative studies are to avoid metaphysical musings, on the one hand, and ethnocentric excess, on the other, they might best proceed on the theoretical basis of natural, species-specific characteristics. I have selected one of the most fundamental of these traits, the apparently innate social character of human be-

ings. As Robertson Smith already argued, human beings are necessarily social creatures engaged in social formation. Anthropologists since Smith have agreed that there are but two types of social—and hence religious—formations: kinship and kingship, alternative distributions of power, whether in the political or in the religious domains, that are amenable, however, to an infinite number of social variations and cultural permutations. The study of such social formations, then, must lead to the study of their development over time and in terms of the contingent characteristics of different locales.

iii

If a theory of comparativism is to be accorded any validity, its explanatory power for "mankind in general" must be tested against the myriad examples of historical particularities which in aggregate are styled human culture. Like any theoretical construct, the kinship/kingship model is itself, of course, a historically specific product. Its view of the state as a federation governed by a king and its difference in kind from the family and its head was first described in the fourth century BCE by Aristotle (*Pol.* 1.1–2) and, somewhat later, in the epic of Israel (Lemche 1998, 130). The latter's narrative account of the religio-political federation of a number of middle eastern tribes, of their construction of a genealogy to establish claims of common descent in support of this federation, and of the emergence of a kingship from the federation's patriarchal council is too well known to repeat in detai. Whatever might be concluded about the historicity of events recounted in this epic, it does offer, in narrative form, a theoretical model for the socio-political organization and development from kinship to kingship of a particular people upon which, of course, W. R. Smith based his own reflections. I should like, therefore, briefly to suggest the comparative utility of the kinship/kingship model of socio-religious organization with reference to two other, roughly contemporary but geographically disparate, examples from antiquity, relations between kin and king in ancient Greece and China.[23]

Beginning in 336 BCE, Alexander III (the Great) of Macedonia successfully established his sovereignty over the lands he conquered from Greece to Persia to the Indus River. With more success than not, he attempted consolidation of the lands he conquered by establishing an *oikoumenē* of Greek language and culture, a program continued by his factious successors until the reestablishment of

23 While I consider the "roughly contemporary" character of the following examples to be historically interesting, I do not necessarily consider it to be theoretically relevant.

consolidated empire under Rome in 30 BCE. Similarly, in 221 BCE, Ch'in Shih Hwang-ti ("the first august emperor") began his conquest of the independent warring states of China and his consolidation of the Chinese empire. Following a revolt against Ch'in rule in 206 BCE, the Han dynasty presided over a unified Chinese empire until its collapse in 220 CE. In both cases, the successful establishment of a kingship type of political organization required strategies which diminished local kin and ethnic identities and the transfer of these allegiances to that required by an overriding imperial power. As Aristotle observed,

> just as the master's rule is a sort of monarchy in the home, so absolute monarchy is domestic mastership (*oikonomia*) over a city, or over a race (*ethnos*) or several races. (Arist. *Pol.* 3.10.2).

Thus, even as Alexander—or his followers—appropriated traditional kinship categories by calling for a universal kingship of mankind in support of his imperial rule (e. g., Arrian 7.11; Diod. 18.4.4.; Plut. *Mor. De Alex. fort*. I.329C-D), so the Han dynasty, which supported Confucianism as the basis of the state, appropriated traditional kinship categories in support of kingship with the addition of fealty of subject to emperor to tradition precepts of "filial piety": subjection of son to father, of younger to elder brother, of wife to husband, and of youth to age (including the ancestors).

Political allegiance was further strengthened in both Greece and China by juridical attempts to weaken kinship structures at their base, namely, ancestor veneration which provided the genealogical as well as legal basis for kinship identity. Funerary legislations controlling and limiting interaction with the dead weakened kin allegiances in favor of allegiance to a larger political entity (S. Johnston 1999, 45, 97–98). The official establishment of cemeteries outside the city walls, for example, distanced the ordinary dead from the city (S. Johnston 1999, 98). And the purification of Delos by removing the dead from the island in 426 BCE exemplified the consolidation of Athenian rule over the island by separating its inhabitants from their own history, even as the universalization of kinship attributed to Alexander attempted to negate local kin allegiances in favor of a politically consolidated *oikoumenē*. Similarly, the political transition to kingship in China was paralleled by a social relocation of the ancestors from their traditional habitation in a this-worldly, if transgenerational, realm of local kin-relations, to a common transcendental heavenly place shared by all (Needham 1974, 77–82).

In China as in Greece, the socio-political landscape of these dead mirrored, along with the society of gods, that of the living (S. Johnston 1999, 160; A. Wolf 1997, 131). Whereas relationships with the ancestors, as with kin generally, are

permanent and involve assumptions of common welfare and mutual dependence, relations with the gods as with kings must be negotiated and continually renewed with offerings and shows of respect. The veneration of ancestors, in other words, represented and maintained transgenerational kin relations; on the other hand, obeisance to deities as to kings reflected political concerns that transcended kin allegiance (A. Wolf 1997, 168).

With the successful consolidation of empire, alternative social experiments and oppositional political groups abounded. From the outset of Alexander's conquests, associations of newly mobile immigrant groups, made possible by the newly cosmopolitan context of empire, began to proliferate. These "voluntary" associations were primarily organized as societies of fictive kin (Martin 1997). The evidence concerning some twenty-four such associations on the Greek island of Delos, for example, has been summarized as reinforcing "a sense of kinship and national identity" in a context "where disparate nationalities and languages abounded" (McLean 1996, 189). Similarly, "secret societies" emerged in the Chinese imperial context to provide those whose kinship bonds had been broken an alternative affiliation by which to promote their interests (Weckman 1987, 153). When the familial or ethnic rationale for membership in these groups became no longer compelling, as in cases of assimilation, mobility, or demise of the first generation, an adjustment was made in the membership criteria of these groups by which kin or ethnic status came to be conferred upon non-ethnic petitioners through initiation rites modeled on the widespread juridical practice of adoption (see, e. g., *Od*. 4.561 ff.; Gal. 4:4 – 5; Rom. 8:14, 23; Apul. *Met*. 5.29, 11.15 – 21). Some of the Hellenistic fictive kin societies, most of which claimed a native or ethnic deity as patron and many of which claimed the designation "mystery," evolved into the famous "mystery cults" of the Hellenistic world, in which formerly familial or native deities became universalized in order to provide patronage for their internationalized clientele (Rohde 1925, 221; Samter 1901, 102; Martin 1997). Claims to kinship with the deities themselves began to emerge in the Hellenistic world from first century BCE (Ps.Pl. *Ax*. 371D) and became common among various of those latter Hellenistic traditions generally designated "gnostic."

The "kinship" organization of alternative societies inalterably established them, in both Greece and China, as political entities in contrast to "kingship" types of organization in which power was claimed by the centralized administration of the state. It is this dichotomy of socio-political organization and not political disenfranchisement that cast the fictive kin associations as polities in contrast to efforts at imperial politics. Rather than viewing these groups as a reaction to a world understood in negative terms, an "age of anxiety," for example, or, as compensations for social dislocation or political disenfranchisement,

we might better view these groups as innovative social experiments under the radically altered socio-political conditions that characterized the emergence of kingships.

iv

What is required for comparative studies is development of the theoretical relationship between the biological and cognitive conditions for and constraints on the practices of *H. sapiens*, on the one hand, and the luxuriance of historically constructed socio-cultural, including religious, expressions, on the other. In other words, this approach does not address the historical complexities that characterize and differentiate the religio-socio-political productions of each and every culture. Rather, biologically based constraints call attention to and give an explanation for the ubiquitous presence of commonality among various human societies, what, following Carrithers, we might term the biological and cognitive archive of human possibilities (Carrithers 1992, 4) along with their diverse socio-cultural produce. And the perception of these commonalities throw into sharp relief that which is not shared among these same societies, namely, the idiosyncratic meanings attached by every human society to their structural commonalities. As postulated by Pascal Boyer:

> Religious concepts seem to combine certain schematic assumptions provided by intuitive ontologies, with nonschematic ones provided by explicit cultural transmission...[T]he stable elements, which are recurrent in the religious systems of many different human groups, are not...[the] historically contingent assumptions...[Religious judgments that differ from one human group to another] are mostly constrained by the activation of intuitive ontologies, that is, by something that is not transmitted culturally and in fact is not "cultural" at all (Boyer 1994, 121, 154).

The situation is more complex than a simple recognition of this relationship between biology and construction, however, since the development of self-reflexivity among human beings means that biology is not determinative but that its default programming may be overridden. And, it must remembered, as Eric Wolf has so forcefully argued, that "human populations [in antiquity as in modernity] construct their cultures in interaction with one another, and not in isolation" (E. Wolf 1997, xv, 3, 5). It is the evolutionary development of the cognitive override and the various histories of the exercise of that override and their interaction that finally explains the specific characteristics that differentiate all human socio-cultural constructions.

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8. Akin to the Gods or Simply One to Another? Comparison with Respect to Religions in Antiquity

> Religion...[is] part of the organized social
> life into which a man...[is] born.
> —W. Robertson Smith (1889, 21)

The problems of comparison with respect to the religions of antiquity are theoretically no different from those of comparative religions generally. In fact, it was the religious situation of Western antiquity that first occasioned the comparative enterprise. As E. O. James has observed:

> From the time when religions mingled in the Graeco-Roman world thinkers have been compelled to evaluate their own beliefs and practices in relation to those of other peoples and races (James 1961, 15).

This origination, however, situated the comparative project itself in a religious context, that is, as an evaluation of one's own beliefs and practices with respect to that of "others." This understanding of comparative religion as religious apologetics has continued until modern times.

Since the late nineteenth century, a scientifically oriented comparison of religions, shorn of the theological bias that traditionally predisposed an identification of *differences* between "our" religion and "theirs," has been dominated by the search for *similarities* (e.g., Weber 1963, 9–10; J. Z. Smith 1982, 21; Saler 1993, 82). This transformation of comparative religion from apologetics into irenics has generally retained its religious character, but now in service to some form of generic religious quest (Martin 2000). In addition to such explicitly religious projects like the construction of a "world theology" with its assumption of an essential spirituality allegedly shared by various religions (e.g., W. C. Smith 1989; Reat and Perry 1991), the academic field of comparative studies is still dominated implicitly by this same Romantic assumption about universal religion (McCutcheon 1997). The presence of perceived similarities among differing religious practices has generally been explained "theoretically" either by establishing, or assuming, some form of historical contact and influence, on the one hand, or by positing some form of archetypal presence, on the other.

The dominant model for explaining religious similarities through historical contact has been the religious culture of Mediterranean antiquity, culminating in the cosmopolitanism occasioned by the conquests of Alexander the Great. To give but one well-known example, Erwin Goodenough argued that the Graeco-

Roman world was characterized by a "*lingua franca*" of "live," predominantly Dionysian, symbols taken over by the contingent religions of the Hellenistic world (Goodenough 1953–1968). Despite criticism (M. Smith, 1967), Jonathan Z. Smith has recognized in Goodenough's work "an attempt to historicize morphology" (J. Z. Smith 1982, 33). Smith's own conclusion is that religious similarities may be understood as the consequence of "*analogical processes*, responding to parallel kinds of religious situations" in a shared, historically constituted cultural field (J. Z. Smith, 1990, 112–113, 120–121).

Comparison with respect to religions in contact or for which a shared cultural field might be assumed presents no problem insofar as comparison is understood to be concerned with similarities. The well-known category for such perceived similarities is "syncretism." However, the issue that remains unaddressed by this explanation is how to account for differences, that is, for the selective retention of any separate identities at all. Why, in other words, do religions in historical contact oftimes result in missed syncretistic opportunities which cultural contact proffers? And why do just certain elements appear in syncretistic formations rather than other possibilities offered by the same historical/cultural context?[24] The problem that historical examples of syncretism presents is that of the criteria of selection, the same issue that challenges comparativists when confronted with subsequent "new world orders."

The dominant rationale that has been offered for comparison when contact cannot be demonstrated or assumed is the positing of archetypes, recurrent themes or practices purportedly observed in most religious expression. The problem with the morphological or phenomenological study of religion, of course, has been its amassing of acontextual data in service to the comparativist's own thematic agenda, a pursuit of triviality termed "parallelomania" by biblical scholars and admonished in their scholarship for over a hundred years but taken little note of by historians of religion.[25]

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24 One answer to this question has been suggested by Timothy Light, who presents "an initial attempt to describe the cognitive mechanisms which lead to syncretism as an inherent part of human religious behavior" (Light 2000, 162).

25 The term "parallelomania" is first documented in Paul Menzel's dissertation: *De Graecis in libris Kohelet et Sophia vestigiis* (Halis Saxonum, 1888, 40), published as *Der grieschsche Einfluß auf Prediger und Weisheit Salomos* (1889). A. T. S. Goodrick cites Menzel's dissertation for the origin of this term (1913, 405), whereas Samuel Holmes cites the published version (Charles I: 533). In his article, "Parallelomania," however, Samuel Sandmel, commenting on comparisons made between "early rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity," recalls encountering this term "in a French book of about 1830, whose title and author I have forgotten" (Sandmel 1962, 1; see n. 1). One of the characteristics that Sandmel attributes to the practice is a neglect of "some elementary issues in chronology" (Sandmel 1962, 4), a disregard Morton Smith criticizes in an article the following year

Further, these "recurrent" themes have tended to be derived from the religions of Western antiquity: the famous notion of the "center," for example, which was modeled after the temple state mythologies of the ancient near east (J. Z. Smith 1987, 1–13) or that of a rising or at least regenerated deity, or possibilities of transformation and transcendence, or the autonomous character of the sacred itself.

But even assuming the validity of such themes, how do we account for their presence apart from generic theological assumptions now generally conceded the work of the phenomenologists of religion? Preoccupations with religious founders and their beliefs or with the ubiquitous issue of religious experience, for example, are both derived from the centrality to Protestantism of a personal salvation by faith alone confirmed through an experience of grace (Martin 1994a, 138 n. 53).

Interestingly, one representative of the morphological tradition may have been on the right track. When C. G. Jung defined archetypes as "psychic instincts" (Jung *CW*, 4: 729; 5: 225; 8: 270–271, 277, 339, 856; 9.i: 91; 9.ii: 278; 10: 547 [references are to volume and paragraph of his *Collected Works*]), as *inherited* tendencies to shape certain motifs (Jung *CW* 18: 523), he used a biological metaphor for the constraining and constructive proclivities of the human mind for which contemporary cognitive psychology is offering empirical evidence. Historical and cultural input is, after all, only perceived to be significant as it is processed by human minds (Pinker 1994, 125). It is such biologically generated, or species-specific, characteristics that might offer a non-ethnocentric and non-metaphysical framework for comparative study.

i

One, apparently universal, characteristic of human beings I should like to explore here is sociability. There seems to be consensus among representatives of the various sciences that human beings are social creatures, and innately so, whether the sociological transformations of this biological imperative might better be explained by ethological theory, as suggested by Walter Burkert (Burkert 1983), by that of cognitive science, as suggested by Thomas Lawson, Robert McCauley and Pascal Boyer (Lawson and McCauley 1990; Boyer 1994), or as the "reciprocal altruism" posited as a consequence of natural selection by neo-Darwinians—a genetically encoded be-

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on precisely the same topic as Sandmel's: "A Comparison of Early Christian and Early Rabbinic Tradition," and in the same journal but without reference to the term itself (M. Smith 1963). A second characteristic that Sandmel attributes to parallelomania is the juxtaposing of excerpts without respect to context (Sandmel 1962, 2, 7), a sense of the term employed by J. Z. (Smith 1978, ix) but without using the term (1982, 29).

havior which might offer an explanation for the other two (Wright 1994, 188 – 209). We are, in other words, both the creators as well as the creatures of our social formations; as Martin Heidegger put it so succinctly, *Dasein ist Mitsein* (Heidegger 1962, Ch. 4).

Although scholars of religion have regularly acknowledged that religion is a social phenomenon, we have not, in the observation of Burton Mack, "dared an honest quest for a thoroughly...social theory of religion (Mack 2001). With a few obvious (and dated) exceptions, notably Durkheim and those influenced by him, religious studies have been sidetracked, again in the words of Mack, by "a lingering fascination with a romantic individualism...which has been valorized by the Enlightenment, cultivated within the humanities, and moralized in American ideology" (Mack 2001). Certainly, such values have informed the study of the religions of antiquity (Martin 1994a).

W. Robertson Smith, a scholar who had a major influence on Durkheim (Kardiner and Preble 1961, 111; Lukes 1972, 239; Parken 1992, 6), was perhaps the first comparative religionist to recognize that religion must be accounted for by its social nature (Kardiner and Preble 1961, 73, n. 2 cite Malinowski on this point). "Every human being," Smith avers, "without choice on his own part, but simply in virtue of his birth and upbringing, becomes a member of...a *natural society*" (W. R. Smith 1972, 29). It is worth emphasizing at the outset that the "blood ties" understood to structure such kinship societies, while modeled on biology are not defined on this basis but on that of sociology. As Smith put it, "[t]he idea that kinship is not purely an affair of birth, but may be acquired, has quite fallen out of our circle of ideas" (W. R. Smith 1972, 273).[26]

Although largely neglected by Smith, the preeminent technique for kinship recruitment apart from birth is adoption (W. R. Smith 1903, 52 – 54). Such fictive kin status could be extended not only to sons (and daughters) but to ancestors and deities as well. It is these common and commemorated ancestors, linked to the present by narratives of descent that provide collective identity to a particular group (W. R. Smith 1972, 40 – 41; see Hutton 1988).[27]

The significance of kinship societies is heightened with the emergence of a second type of human social organization: kingships. In Smith's formulation:

> the primitive equality of the tribal system tends in progress of time to transform itself into an aristocracy of the more powerful kins, or of the more powerful families within one

26 Fustel de Coulanges, one of the influences on Smith (Lukes, 1972, 238), noted that agnation, from ancient Greece until imperial Rome, was cultic and not physiological (Coulanges 1979 [1901], 51, 59).
27 Hutton builds upon the work of M. Halbwachs, one of Durkheim's students. See especially Halbwachs 1941; also J. Z. Smith 1987, 116 – 116.

> kin...[with the consequence that] wealth begins to be unequally distributed (W. R. Smith 1972, 73).

Since, as Michel Foucault has more recently emphasized, all social relationships are relationships of power, the difference between these two "ideal types" of social organization might best be formulated in terms of a differing distribution of power.[28] Whereas power in kinship groups is disseminated more or less equally throughout the society, kingships are characterized by a consolidation of power; and the one tends to follow upon the other. These consolidations of power present a challenge to local distributions of power even as the continuing existence of local power challenges that of imperial sovereignty and their legitimating state religions.

In my book on *Hellenistic Religions*, I identified three types of discourse and practice that are usually grouped together as "religious" in contrast to the "formalities" of state or imperial religion: piety, mystery, and gnosis (Martin 1987, 11). By example, I should like now to associate these discourses and practices with an identifiable sociology and, specifically, with differing forms of kinship societies.

ii

Pietistic practices are the most exemplary of kinship societies. Piety (Gk: *eusebeia*, Lt: *pietas*) designates a traditional system of "right" relationships,

> conventional practices concerning home and family and, by extension, those practices which surround and are part of being at home in one's world under the rule of a family of gods....[Such practices] are always articulated in terms of a particular locale or place and are transmitted through local tradition. They represent the expression by a particular people of their local order of things (Martin 1987, 11–12).

Piety, so defined, belongs to the sociology of what Robertson Smith termed a "natural society," the correctness of the relationships being defined by each such society.

Less remarked are the claims by various gnostic traditions to kinship bonds established through descent from a common divine ancestor or deity. The clearest example is those claiming descent from Seth (Martin 1990); however, it is characteristic of all gnostic anthropology to have claimed consubstantiality with deity

28 See the helpful summary of Foucault's use of "power" by Alan Sheridan, 1980, 183–85; also Eli Sagen, *At the Dawn of Tyranny: The Origins of Individualism, Political Oppression, and the State*, New York 1985, pp. 236, 240.

through descent, a theme elaborated in their myth of cosmogonic fall and emphasized already by Hans Jonas (Jonas 1958, 44).

An understanding of the Hellenistic mystery cults as kinship groups is much less obvious, despite their preponderant use of kinship terminology. Consequently, it is to this conundrum of my hypothesis to which I should like to devote a more detailed analysis.

Conceived as kinship groups, we may speak of two types of mystery associations, both seemingly based on Hellenistic interpretations of the ancient mysteries of Demeter celebrated at Eleusis: the first defined by alliances of fictive siblings, and a second defined by alliances of fictive descendants from the cult deity, both types of relationships established through rites of initiation.

In the first type of mystery group, the initiates, in the observation of Franz Cumont, "considered themselves brothers no matter where they came from." As Cumont recognized, these "communities of initiates" were replacements for the "ancient social groups" (Cumont 1956, 27).

Private clubs or societies, documented already from classical Greece, proliferated during the Hellenistic period (Tod 1932, 73).[29] This proliferation seems to have been stimulated by conditions of empire, especially by the new possibilities of social mobility occasioned by military service and commercial enterprise. The Hellenistic societies were often groups of ethnic "brothers" banded together in a foreign land for comradeship and established under the patronage of a native deity. Espousing noble ideals, these groups offered those separated from their traditional kin status as ascribed by birth an alternative, *fictive*, kin identity acquired by initiation. As successive empires more or less successfully established a cosmopolitan culture around the Mediterranean basin, the membership of these religio-social groups, many of which called themselves "mysteries," increasingly lost their character as ethnically defined brotherhoods and began to recruit a wider membership.

Those fictive kin groups that developed into mystery cults, and of course not all of them did, seemingly went through a development from family cult to open membership analogous to that of the Eleusinian celebrations. As Erwin Rohde observed:

> Originally this festival...admitted only the citizens of Eleusis, perhaps only the members of certain noble Eleusinian families...[Later, a]dmission to it was thrown open to all Greeks—not merely Athenians, but every Greek without distinction of race or country, whether man or woman, was welcomed at Eleusis...What a contrast to the exclusive cult-unions into which a man had to be born in order, as citizen of a state, member of a *phratria*, clan, or family, to participate in the advantages they offered! (Rohde 1925, 221).

29 The classic work on Greek associations remains that of Franz Poland 1909; on the Latin associations, Jean Pierre Waltzing 1895–1900.

Ernst Samter had earlier argued that the mystery cults generally developed from such exclusivist family cults (Samter 1901, 102).

In the second type of mystery group, it was, as W. K. C. Guthrie concluded, "kinship with the gods [that] was the real qualification for a blessed immortality" (Guthrie 1950, 292). Robertson Smith believed that a kinship with deity was originally established and maintained through rites of sacrifice (W. R. Smith 1972, 284), and sacrifice was certainly a central feature of the Hellenistic mysteries, from that of pigs during the Eleusinian "Lesser Mysteries" through what could only be perceived by second-century Romans as a portrayal of sacrifice in the central tauroctonous image of Mithraism (Martin 1994b). The sole Hellenistic text that clearly speaks of kinship to deity, again with reference to the Eleusinian Mysteries, is the second or first century B.C. pseudo-Platonic dialogue, *Axiochus*. In this dialogue, Axiochus is named as *gennētēs tōn theōn*, 'kin to the gods,' not as a consequence of sacrifice, however, but of initiation (Pl. [*Ax.*] 371 D) (Hershbell 1981, 68–69; Rohde 1925, 601–603).[30] As a precedent, Guthrie cites the episode in the *Odyssey* where Menelaos is promised an afterlife on the Elysian Plain as a consequence of "his adoption into the family of the gods...through his marriage to Helen" (*Od*. 4.561ff). He extends thereby the argument of Rohde about the Eleusinian rites as an expanded family cult to suggest that the privileges of Elysium were extended at Eleusis from kin by marriage (the example of Menelaos) to kin by rites of initiation modeled upon the legal practice of adoption (Guthrie 1950, 291–292; but see Walton 1953).

To the extent that the mysteries were in some sense fictive kinship groups, adoption, the juridical category of kinship recruitment, provided a natural model for the rites of initiation (Piana 1927). Coulanges had already suggested that such ceremonies as marriage, birth, adoption, installation of a new slave were initiation rites through which new members were received into the cult of the house.[31] Subsequently, Albrecht Dieterich argued that initiation into the cults of Orphism and Mithraism was equivalent to a symbolic adoption by their respective deities (Dieterich 1891, 38, but see Rohde 1925, 601–602; Dieterich 1966, 136–137), a position also argued by Hugo Hepding for the cult of the Phrygian Mother (Hepding 1903, 178 and n. 4), the position earlier argued for both Orphism and Mithraism by Dieterich. And, as has been much discussed, Paul uses the juridical term for adoption,

30 On the dating of the *Axiochus*, see Hershbell 1981, 20. As Walter Burkert has noted, *initia* is the Latin translation of *mysteria* (Burkert 1987, 7–8 and n. 33).

31 Rather than adoption, Samter suggests marriage as the analogy for mystery initiation (Samter 1901, 100). To the extent that the intent of initiation was to establish (fictive) kin relationships, (fictive) *affine* relationships established by marriage would not be to the point. In either case, however, kinship established through rites of initiation are derived from or modeled upon initiation into the family cult (Coulanges 1979 [1901], 42; Samter 1901, 9).

huiothesia, to described those redeemed by God's son as themselves adopted sons of God (Gal. 4:4–5; Rom. 8:14, 23) (Dieterich 1966, 152–153).

The "real and original meaning of all adoption," according to Rohde, was that:

> One who has no son to leave behind him will make haste to take a son from another family into his own house, who, together with his property will inherit also the duty of offering a regular and enduring cult to his adopted father, and his new ancestors, and of caring for the needs of their souls (Rohde 1925, 172).

Citing Rohde's observation that adoption was represented as a rebirth from the womb of the new mother, Guthrie notes that "rebirth was [for this reason] a category applied also to initiates in certain mysteries" (Guthrie 1950, 292). Specifically, he cites Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in which Lucius' status in the Isis Cult is not attained by his birth or inheritance (*Met*. 11.15) but by a rebirth (*renatus*) (*Met*. 11.16), a transformation explicitly identified with cult initiation (*Met*. 11.21; compare Plutarch, *De Is. et Os*. 35 on the "rebirth" of Osiris) (Griffiths 1975, 258). What Guthrie does not note is that in Book 5 of the *Metamorphoses*, Venus, who later is identified with Isis in Lucius' famous prayer to the "Blessed Queen of Heaven" (*Met*. 11.2), castigates her son, Eros, for his disobedience, and despite her advanced age, threatens to "produce another son much better than" him through "adoption" (*adoptatio*) and to make over Eros' inheritance to this adopted son (*Met*. 5.29)—a prolepsis realized in the initiation/adoption of Lucius if Reinhold Merkelbach's thesis concerning *Roman und Mysterium* be granted any validity whatsoever.[32]

Those religious communities in which members were understood to be kin with the deity through adoption were related to the later development of gnostic groups with their understanding of relation to deity through descent. This shared understanding of some form of kinship with deity seems to have been mediated by middle and neo-Platonic elaborations—from the *Axiochus* to Apuleius to Plotinus—on the Platonic ideal of *homoiōsis theō*, 'likeness to God' (*Tht*. 176B) (Dillon 1977, 44, 192; Hershbell, 1981, 18; Martin 1997). Whereas a fraternal structure of fictive sibling relations established group solidarity, structures of descent insured the transgenerational continuity of the group.

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32 Merkelbach writes: "*jeder Myste durch die Initiation Adoptivsohn der Isis wurde*" (p. 28). Merkelbach also notes with respect to *The Story of Apollonius King of Tyre*, which he states "*liegt ursprünglich ein griechischer Isis-roman zugrunde*" (p. 160), that "[*d*]*ie Adoption and Weihe* [of King Antiochus' daughter] *als Priesterin* [*im Tempel der Diana*] *werden im Ritual identisch sein*" (Merkelbach 1962, 165).

In the face of emerging kingship societies consequent upon the ideal of empire, the threatened existence of perduring kin groups began to be expressed through a rhetoric of secrecy, despite the fact that this character of many of these groups was fictive—or perhaps, *because* of this character. The closed nature of such groups was not a *sui generis* characteristic of their "mystery" or religiosity but simply of their bounded identity: their non-exclusivity with respect to one another is well documented—one might be and often was initiate in any number of these groups (Martin 1995a). Claims of secrecy were, in other words, a prophylactic against the growing power of the cosmopolitan state which characterized the Hellenistic world from Alexander to Augustus, a political power increasingly reinforced by the cult of the emperor (Martin 1990, 35). The respersion of Roman power from Augustus to Theodosius increasingly vitiated the role of the "secret" or bounded societies and occasioned the possibility of social organizations with universalistic claims, societies such as the Isiac, the Mithraic, and the Christian. Only the latter consolidated itself into a viable alternative to the declining fortunes of Roman political power and to the ascendant claims of its religious rivals.

iii

Although I have attempted to illustrate the utility of the kinship/kingship model of social organization with the example of Hellenistic religions even as Robertson Smith had with respect to Semitic religion, I offer it as a general hypothesis to be tested by those with expertise in other cultural domains. By way of conclusion, consequently, I should like briefly to suggest three further examples where the kinship/kingship model of social organization would seem to be relevant to the religious situation.

A first example is provided by early Christian developments, themselves a part of the larger Hellenistic religious situation, and the Christian establishment of novel social formations at the expense of their ancestral kin: "leave the dead to bury their own dead," Jesus says to a potential follower, and "follow me" (Q: Mt. 8:22// Lk. 9:60). The subsequent institutionalization of an "orthodox" Christianity in the fourth century was accomplished not only by a condensation of religious power from the heterogenous possibilities of its socially marginal predecessors, a consolidation not without political implications, but also by the adoption of new, distinctively Christian ancestors—the martyrs. Christians, like many of the Hellenistic societies before them, began to accept funerary responsibilities for their members (see e. g., Tert. *Apol.* 39), exemplifying a persistent, transgenerational pattern of relationship among their members. As part of this process, one of these "Christian special dead," as Peter Brown calls them (Brown 1981), became commonly accepted as the

divine founder. (It is interesting to note the continuing conflict between governmental authority and the Mafia families in modern Italy—despite their common embrace of the culturally dominant religion, Roman Catholicism.)

A second example is provided by the Chinese consolidation of independent warring states into a common cultural entity under the Han dynasty, a period that parallels the Hellenistic (206 BC – 220 AD). This political transition was paralleled by a social relocation of the ancestors from their traditional habitation in a this-worldly, if transgenerational, realm of local kin-relations, to a common transcendental heavenly place shared by all (Needham 1974, Pt. 2: 77–82; Martin 1995b, 192–193). In the emergent imperial context, as in the Hellenistic, secret societies provided those whose kinship bonds had been broken an alternative affiliation by which to promote their interests (Weckman 1987, Vol. 13: 153).

For a third example, we might look to the so-called syncretistic religions of Latin America. Similar to the Hellenistic and Chinese contexts, these religions have been occasioned by a consolidation of power—in this case, largely economic—in and around major cities. The consequent rush to urbanization has undermined local, traditional lifestyles and uprooted much of the population. The religious formations that result are constructed by numerous, newly constituted groups from various native practices but expressed in terms of a colonially imposed Christianity (Masferrer Kan 1993). As in modern comparative studies generally, Latin American "syncretistic" formations have typically been explained as the consequence of similarities perceived between native religious practices and Catholic Christianity (Hedrick 1967, 3). More recent scholarship, however, has emphasized the "noncorrespondences and contradictions" preserved by these religious formations (Torres 1992, 105). As in descriptions of early Christianity, the focus on syncretism has masked notice of novel social formations.

What I have tried to suggest is that comparative studies, if they are to avoid metaphysical musings, on the one hand, and ethnocentric excess, on the other, might best proceed on the basis natural, species-specific characteristics. I have selected one of the most fundamental of these traits, our apparently innate social character. As Robertson Smith already argued, human beings are necessarily social creatures engaged in social formation. Anthropologists since Smith have agreed that there are but two types of social—and hence religious—formations: kinship and kingship, distributions of power subject, however, to an infinite number of social variations and cultural permutations. The study of such social formations, then, must lead to history, the study of the development of these formations over time and in terms of the contingent characteristics of different places. I am suggesting, in other words, a theoretical progression from biology to sociology to the history of—in our case—religions.

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9. Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities

> Hamlet: What news?
> Rosencrantz: None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.
> Hamlet: Then is doomsday near.
>
> – *Hamlet* II.2.237–240

A Hellenistic period of history was first defined in the mid-nineteenth century by J.G. Droysen in his three-volume *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1836–1846) as extending from the Graeco-Macedonian empire of Alexander the Great to the consolidation of Roman power under Augustus in 30 B.C.E. (Droysen 1980 [1952–1953]: I, 3; II, 442). Historical periodization is, however, a form of historical generalization shaped by the criteria of the historian's own historical context (Finley 1963, esp. 23–24). The criteria which must be reckoned as influencing Droysen's innovative generalization about a Hellenistic period included not only the traditional, theologically informed periodizing of a pagan age that ended with Augustus and of a Christian age that began during his reign (Lk. 2:1–7), but also the political values of a nascent European historiography shaped by the rise of nationalism and the consequent founding of national archives (Martin 1990a, 124). But theologically and politically defined historical periods do not always correspond to culturally defined periods of history[33]—as Droysen himself recognized (Bayer in Droysen 1980 [1952–1953], 474–475). A Hellenistic period of religious history might rather be defined as extending indeed from the cultural conditions occasioned by Alexander's empire but as enduring until the end of the fourth century C.E. with the establishment of Christianity as the virtually uncontested dominant feature of Western culture (Martin 1983, 132–134).

The protracted conquest of political space ensuing from the imperial aspirations of Alexander and continued by his successors had challenged, among other local institutions, traditional locative definitions of social existence, to produce a complex and richly textured religious culture that included private clubs, the mysteries, and even some of the early Christianities.[34] This profusion of alternative religious communities perdured well beyond any imagined social cohesiveness under the *pax Romana*; indeed, this social diversification intensified throughout the centuries of Roman rule. The *politeia* of the traditional *polis,* as

33 "[A]ssumptions about periodization...may impose an unexplained or unjustified organization of the subject matter to be presented and may bring in their wake other unexamined assumptions of generalization" (Gottschalk on Finley 1963, 197).

34 See the similar characterization of the Graeco-Roman age by Mack (1993, 65–68).

of the subsequent imperial ideals, gave ground, in other words, to the *mystēria* of club and cult.[35]

Clubs and Colleges

Social reality in the Hellenistic world was exemplified by the ubiquity of its clubs and *collegia*. These private associations, so-defined in contrast to the public institutions of political life, seem always to have been part of ancient Mediterranean culture.[36] As early as the sixth century B.C.E., the Athenian statesman, Solon, accepted their legality "provided they were not contrary to the laws of the state" (Gaius, *Dig.* 47.22.4)—although Plato later recommended legislation against them (Pl. *Lg.* 909e-910c). The founding of the Latin *collegia* was attributed to Numa, the traditional seventh-century B.C.E, second king of Rome (Plu. *Numa* 17; Plin. *HN* 34.1; 35.159) (on these citations, see Gabba 1984). As a consequence of their involvement in political intrigue, the Roman colleges were suppressed by the senate in 64 B.C.E. and again by Caesar following a revival in 58 B.C.E. There seems to have been little government interest in such associations after 100 C.E., however, and in 136 C.E. the senate legalized the formation of associations devoted to funerary obligations, provided they met not more than once a month to receive contributions. Even under this legal constraint, Roman clubs flourished (Dill 1911, 254–256; Stevensen 1970).

Evidence for the Greek clubs and societies, as for their Roman collegial counterparts, is almost entirely epigraphical (Tod 1932, 72–73). Although attested from antiquity, a proliferation of inscriptions from the fourth century B.C.E. through the third century C.E. document these private associations as primarily a Hellenistic institution (Tod 1932, 73).

The earliest attested of the Hellenistic societies were the *orgeōnes*, from *orgiazō*, 'to pay ritual service to the gods' (Is. 2.14, 16; IG2^2 1252 [fourth century B.C.E.]) (Poland 1909, 8–16), generally, by sacrifice (*SIG* 57.4; A. *Th.* 179; S. *Tr.* 765, *Ant.* 1013). The worship of Demeter at Eleusis was so characterized, for example (*H. Cer.* 273, 476; Ar. *Ra.* 386; Th. 948), as was that of the Cabeiri and

35 This is to suggest only that the polis *ideal* was challenged, but not, as is often proposed, an end to the continued political effectiveness of the city-state organization throughout the Hellenistic period (see Gruen 1991).

36 Poland (1909), built on Foucart 1975 [1873] and made possible by Mommsen's (1843) pioneering monograph, remains the classic work on the Greek associations. See also Tod's summary of Poland's work (1932), and Tod's article on Greek clubs (1970). On the Latin associations, see Waltzing (1895–1900).

Demeter Achaia (Hdt. 5.51, 5.61), of Orpheus (Hdt. 2.81), of Cybele (E. *Ba*. 78), and, most frequently of all, Dionysus (Hdt. 2.81; E. *Ba*. 34; Theoc. 26.13). These native "religious associations" are conventionally compared, according to a typology of religious "intensity" derived from the work of Franz Poland at the beginning of the century,[37] with the *thiasōtai*, associations of foreigners for the worship of one of their national deities (Tod 1932, 74–75; Poland 1909, 16–28)—although these religious innovations were not always welcome (Garland 1992, 150); and these groups are contrasted, in turn, with the *eranistai* in which the religious dimension, it is suggested, is subordinate to social and economic concerns (Tod 1932, 75; Poland 1909, 28–33), and, finally, to purely "secular" clubs exemplified by the *synodoi* and the *koina (*Tod 1932, 75; Poland 1909, 158–168).

Such typologies are misleading, however, as they are based on the assumption that such a reality as "religion" existed in antiquity as a discrete cultural or institutional reality that may be measured over against the non-religious. Although the clubs generally claimed divine patronage (Poland 1909, 57), Poland already recognized that the nature and purpose of the associations could not be ascertained from their divine patronyms (1909, 5–6). To refer to a frequently cited example, an inscription from Pompeii encouraging a group with the name "Isiaci" to vote in upcoming elections for a certain Helvius Sabinus: it was no more unusual or noteworthy for an association that derived its name and identity from a patron deity to urge the election of a particular candidate to political office than for fellow members of some trade association to support the election of their own favorite son.[38] It has increasingly been recognized that what has been named "religion," or identified as "religious," in the Hellenistic world is embedded in social relations and political strategies (Malina 1986). There just was no clear distinction between the religious and secular functions of these Hellenistic communities. Some have argued, consequently, that the primary purpose of all the associations was social (Meeks 1983, 31, 79). Poland concluded, however, that "in a certain sense, every association was a cult association since religious practices, above all religious banquets, were generally of great

37 In addition to the summary by Tod, see, for example, Wach (1931, 113), Tarn (1961, 93–94), and Garland (1992, 11).

38 "The worshippers of Isis unanimously urge the election of Gnaeus Helvius Sabinus as *aedile*" (no. 6420b in Dessau 1906); cited and translated by Wilken (1984, 13); see also Burkert (1987, 48). Compare no. 6411a: "The fruit dealers unanimously urge the election of Marcus Holconius Priscus as *duovir* with judicial power"; and no. 6419c: "The goldsmiths unanimously urge the election of Gaius Cuspius Pansa as *aedile*." The influence of elections seems to have been a primary activity of these clubs from their Greek beginnings (Thuc. 8.54), and was continued by their Latin counterparts (Cic. *Pro Plancio, passim*).

significance" (Poland 1909, 5 – 6). It is in this broad, behavioral sense, therefore, that we might refer to the Hellenistic associations as religious communities.

Although Thucydides had judged "the tie of [political] party" (*ta hetairika*) to be stronger than "the tie of blood" (*to suggenes*) (Th. 3.82.6), the private clubs were, in fact, fictive kin affiliations that provided substitute kin relations for those newly cosmopolitanized citizens of the Hellenistic world who had lost contact with their natural kin (Nock 1924, 105; Fox 1987, 84; but see Meeks 1983, 225 n. 73; Mack 1993, 67).[39] Social demarcations in the Hellenistic world traditionally ascribed by birth, race, gender, class (or occupation) were continued by these subcultural affiliations (Meeks 1983, 78), with favorable conditions for admission often extended to sons and descendants (Fox 1967, 88), and membership itself becoming, in some cases, an inheritance (Ferguson 1987, 106; see Galatians for the Pauline view of inheritance).

The strategy of recruitment for the fictive, as for natural, kinship societies was adoption, a legal fiction that permits kin relations to be created artificially (Maine 1986 [1861], 22),[40] and which provided the model for the discourse of conversion and the practice of initiation in genealogically articulated systems (la Piana 1927, 325). The Greek juridical term for adoption, *huiothesia*, is used in this derivative sense most notably by Paul (see Gal. 4:5) (Betz 1979, 208 – 209, also 185 – 186). Such fictive kin systems reinforced, thereby, second society loyalties (Wach 1931, 110; Tefft 1980, 329), to the extent that many of these groups took over the traditional family funerary obligations for their members (Poland 1909, 503 – 513; Fox 1967, 84 – 89), the performance of which constituted, in fact, legal evidence for establishing claims of legitimacy in disputed cases of adoption (Garland 1992, 143).

Membership in these small associations—their membership rarely exceeded a hundred (Tarn 1961, 93)—was voluntary, in the sense of selectivity, however, rather than choice, since admission was dependent upon the approving vote of existing members (Tod 1932, 85, see 87; Wach 1931, 116). They were typically organized on the constitutional model of municipalities and towns in which citizenship was ascribed by place or birth, not a surprising development given the

39 The secret societies of China similarly provided those without strong family ties an alternative affiliation by which to promote their interests (Weckman 1987, 153). Theoretical portions of the following discussion are adapted from (Martin 1990b).

40 The criteria for assigning persons to the role of kin in any society are a social invention that varies from culture to culture in ways having little or nothing to do with biology (see White 1963, 6; Fox 1967, 34), as the frequency of adoption in Roman society suggests (Maine 1986 [1861], 107; Veyne 1987, 17).

tendency of any subcultural development to replicate structures of the dominant society (Erickson 1981, 188, 195–196).

As has often been remarked but little regarded, the organization of the mystery cults did not differ markedly from that of other Hellenistic associations. The votaries of Isis like those of Mithras, for example, were distributed throughout the Hellenistic world in relatively small, local groups, each having an official roll of members presided over by a council of decurions with a director, treasurer and lawyer, and with a "father," a "mother" or a patron at their head. And, like their sister associations, the mysteries "depended to a great extent, for the creation of chapels and the endowment of their services, on the generosity of their wealthier members and patrons" (Dill 1911, 612 [summarizing Cumont 1956(1903), 168–171]; see also Dill 1911, 581 [summarizing Foucart 1975(1873), 25–30]). At least one scholar has explicitly suggested that the Eleusinians had more in common with the Greek associations than with our modern constructs of what constitutes a "mystery" (Oepke 1967) and, another, that initiation into the Eleusinian, as in the other mysteries, was equivalent to adoption by the presiding deity.[41]

Although the third-century Church Father, Cyprian, contemptuously dismissed the Roman *collegia* as interested only in their banquets and burials (*Ep.* 67.6), early Christian groups were perceived as such associations by many, and, apparently, some were actually organized as such (Wilken 1984, 47). Celsus, for example, characterized Christian groups as "obscene and secret associations" (*Cels.* 8.17) that operated "contrary to the laws" (*Cels.* 1.1), while Minucius Felix, complained about their "secret and nocturnal rites" (Min. Fel. *Oct.* 8–9). But, in his defense of the Christians, Minucius's contemporary, Tertullian, describes their organization precisely in the technical terms associated with the Roman *collegia*: *factio Christiana, corpus, secta Dei, coito Christianorum, curia*. They had a common chest (*arca*) to which they contributed gifts (*honoraria*) and offerings (*stips*), they shared their property and goods—although Tertullian was at pains to assure his readers that the Christians did *not* share their wives. And like the Roman *collegia* castigated by Cyprian, Tertullian emphasized that the Christians had regular meetings that included festive meals, and they buried their dead (Text. *Apol.* 39).

The acceptance of funerary responsibilities by many of the Hellenistic religious communities exemplifies a persistent pattern of relationship among their

41 Guthrie (1950, 292–293) cites the first-century B.C. pseudo-Platonic dialogue, *Axiochos*, which states that an initiate into the Eleusinian Mysteries becomes a kinsman (*gennētēs*) of the gods.

members (Nock 1924, 105), insuring not only their solidarity but the transgenerational continuity of traditional group identity and loyalty as well. Such well-defined groups retained, thereby, a particularized and exclusivistic definition based upon claims of common descent, whether natural or fictive, and tended to react, as such, to the growing complexities and challenges of Hellenistic cosmopolitan culture with suspicion and hostility (Tod 1932, 81; Stock 1983, 15–16).[42]

There are basically two types of relationships between subgroups and the dominant social order, or the ambition for such an order: those that oppose and those that support the existing order (Tefft 1980, 14–15), or, are perceived to do one or the other. Examples of religious communities perceived to oppose the ambiguities of order in the Hellenistic world include the Roman followers of Dionysus and their suppression by the senate in 186 B.C.E., and the early Christian movements—opposed by Rome, on the legal precedent, perhaps, of the earlier senatorial decree suppressing the Bacchanalia (Wilken 1984, 17). Among examples of groups that supported the existing order must be counted those of the devotees of Demeter, Mithras, and, post-Constantinian Christianity. But whether oppositional or conformative, all Hellenistic religious communities represented, in fact as in organization, "a second world alongside the manifest world," the construction of which, in the oft-cited conclusion of G. Simmel, is facilitated by the secret (Simmel 1950, 330).

From their classical origins, the exclusivist associations were described as existing "for selfish aggrandizement contrary to the established laws" (Th. 3.82.6) and as operating, therefore, "secretly" (Th. 8.65). The word used by Thucydides, *krupha*, has the meaning of 'hidden' or 'concealed' and is opposed to *phanerōs*, 'openly,' or, in the political context, 'public' (Th. 1.69, 3.27), as, for example, in the contrast between secret ballot and open vote (D. 43.82).

Kruphios and its cognate *kruptos,* however, were notions that played little role in Greek religion for which the typical term was *mystērion*,[43] as the Hellenistic private communities—some of which were self-consciously organized as

42 I do not mean to equate this typical construction of "otherness" which is a necessary concomitant of any social formation with the *ängstlicher* individualism attributed Hellenistic culture by academic tradition (for example, Burkert 1987, 114), and expressed in such metaphors of individual pathology as "failure of nerve" (Murray 1955, 119–120), "age of anxiety," (Dodds 1970), or "cosmic paranoia" (J. Z. Smith 1978, 161). Such psychologistic characterizations of a far-reaching and enduring cultural era makes about as much sense as observing, in the insightful formulation of Ramsay MacMullen, that "in Italy, Switzerland, the Low Countries, Britain, France, and Spain between about 1400 and 1600, people were tense and worried" (MacMullen 1981, 123).

43 —nor did the Greeks ever name a festival *arrēta*; on the later development of "secrecy" as the sense of *mystēria* (see Clinton 1992, 86, n. 122).

mystai (Poland 1909, 36–41) others of which included also "mystery celebrations" (Poland 1909, 270 note)—illustrate, as do the better known "mystery cults" such as those celebrated at Eleusis (Oepke 1967). Nevertheless, at least two well-known public figures were charged with inappropriately publicizing the Eleusinian mysteries: Aeschylus, in one of his plays (Arist. *EN* 3. 1),[44] and Alcibiades, during an evening of intoxicated revelry with his comrades. Aeschylus, according to one source, claiming that he did not know that these mysteries were to be concealed, was acquitted (Heraclid Pont., fr. 170) (Wehrli 1953); Alcibiades, who mocked the mysteries by performing them apart from the sacred *temenos* (Thuc. 6.28, 61, Plu. *Alc*. 19), was convicted. The prosecution of Aeschylus and Alcibiades was not, however, for revealing mystery *krupta*, but for impiety (*asebeia*), that is, for profaning the mysteries.[45] The crime of revealing the mysteries, in other words, seems not to do with disclosures of concealed information, of mystery contents, which, in most cases, were either trivial or public all along (contra Simmel 1950, 364; see Weckman 1987, 151; Bellman 1984, 142),[46] and which, as Burkert has noted, "did no harm to the institutions" in any case (Burkert 1987, 9), but with the intent or attitude of collective context that renders any gesture or practice to be ritual rather than rote[47]—a judgment that seems to be confirmed by the verbal prescriptions for the conduct of the mysteries (*orgia*) of Demeter according to her "Homeric Hymn" (*H. Cer.* 273–274) (Dodds 1960, 136). In the famous words of Erwin Rohde's demythologization of Creuzer's *Mythologie der alter Völker*, "It was difficult to let out the 'secret,' since there was essentially no secret to let out," for the mysteries were essentially a dramatic performance (Rohde 1950 [1925], 222).

Ritual performances, especially funerary and initiatory rites, establish and maintain the various orders and domains of social reality by working "simultaneously to define membership and to exclude outsiders" (see Fernandez's "Forward" in Bellman 1984, viii). The substance of such ritual definitions of social exclusivity, anthropologists have emphasized, is the claim to secrecy (Bellman 1984, 79). The "doing" of secrecy, in other words, is not primarily a concealing

44 Whether Aeschylus was charged under laws of the Demos or under those of the Eleusinian priesthood (Plu. *Alc*. 22.3; see Garland 1992, 139) is irrelevant to this comparison with Alcibiades.

45 On *asebeia* as a juridical category, see Rudhardt (1960).

46 It is usually acknowledged that the well-known "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," for example, was the "official" myth for the Eleusinian mysteries (Mylonas 1961, 3; Richardson 1974, 13), but see now Clinton, who presents the most interesting argument that the core episodes of this Hymn reflect rather *aitia* of the earlier Attic Thesmophoria (1992, 13–14, 28–37). On public knowledge concerning Mithraic iconography, see Martin 1994: 218.

47 See the suggestive but neglected paper by S. Freud, "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices" (1959 [1907]).

of some knowledge, but rather embodies the ritual procedures necessary for the formation and maintenance of social boundaries (Bellman 1984, 140). And while such ritual performances clearly establish boundaries between insiders and outsiders by investing cultic actions and their implements with certain meanings that are of significance only to the insiders, it is equally clear that outsiders are generally uninterested in what they consider to be the bizarre practices of marginal others once they become convinced that these others do not in fact possess some knowledge that is either superior or seditious. For the insiders, however, it is precisely the traditional procedures and practices that must be preserved and transmitted if their society is to perdure. One definition that has been offered of initiation is that it is: "the dramatic enactment of the natural history of a secret from its inception until the time when the need for concealment is past" (Belman 1984, 142). Ritual initiation into the well-defined private or "mystery" groups implies, in other words, pedagogical rather than hidden relationships, as use of *myeō* in the sense of "instruction" suggests (see Phil. 4:12).

Coincidental with the development and distribution of the Hellenistic religious communities, and especially the "mystery cults," there developed a pedagogical "culture of silence" (*siōpē*), wherein the young, according to Plutarch, learned philosophy in contrast to classical dialectical techniques (Plu. *Rec. Rat. Aud.* 4) (Foucault 1988, 32). Reputedly, Epictetus once demonstrated this "style of teaching" by "falling into silence" (*apesiōpēsen*) (Epic. 2.14.1). This pedagogical culture of silence is attested in the context of Hellenistic religious communities by the "banquets of silence" held by the Therapeutae of the Alexandrian desert during which they received instruction (Philo, *Cont. Vita* 76).[48] The word for "silence" used by Philo in his account,[49] *hēsuchia,* from *hēsuchazō*, "to maintain silence," is another sense of "secrecy" (Plu. *Alc.* 24; Th. 8.69; Plot 2.9.18) that is associated especially with the Pythagoreans (Luc. *Vit. Auct.* 3). Initiates into the Pythagorean societies were widely known for their undertaking of a five-year period of pedagogical silence (Iamb. *VP* 68, 72, 94; D.L. 8.10, 22) which earned them the appellation "followers of the 'things heard'" (*akousmatikoi*)"

48 The thrice-daily communal meals of the Essenes, who were organized, according to the report by Josephus, as a secret society (J. *BJ* 2.141), were also taken in silence (J. *BJ* 2.130); compare the similar account of communal meals in the Qumran community (1QS 6.1 – 6). There is no suggestion, however, of any instruction given during these meals; in fact, only fully initiated members of the community might participate in these communal meals according to both Josephus and the rules of discipline of the Qumran community (J. *BJ* 2.129; 1QS 6.20 – 21). On the relationship of the communal meals of the Essenes and those at Qumran, see Kuhn (1957).
49 —as in Josephus' account of the Essenes.

(Iamb. *VP* 81).[50] These themes of silence, pedagogy and the mysteries all coalesce in the *Vita Apollonii Tyanensis* in which Philostratus writes that whenever Apollonius, who, like the Pythagoreans, had taken a five-year vow of silence,

> came on a city engaged in civil conflict…he would put an end to all the disorder (by indicating something of his intended rebuke by manual gesture or by look on his face), and people hushed their voices, as if they were engaged in the mysteries (*VA* 1.15).

The Hellenistic culture of silence was taken up by early Christians into their own pedagogical practices as well. "[B]e quiet (*hēsuchios*)," catechumens are instructed in the *Didache,* "ever fearing the words you have heard" (Did. 3.87/Barn. 19.4). And, in the admonition of Ignatius, "It is better to be silent (*siōpan*)…than to talk…" (Ign. *Eph.* 15.1), for it is in the *hēsuchia theou* that *mystēria* are wrought (Ign. *Eph.* 19.1; see also Hipp. *Ref. 1. proem.*).

And, as might be expected, pedagogical silence was central to the gnostic and Hermetic traditions. The opening line of the *Apocryphon of John*, for example, refers to "[t]he teaching [of the] savior and [the revelations] of the mysteries [which] are hidden in silence [and which] he taught to John, his disciple" (NHC II 1, 1–4), whereas the Hermetic catechumen speaks of his silence becoming "pregnant with good and the birthing of the word" as "a progeny of goods" (GH 1.30; see also 10.5 and 13.8).[51]

The Hellenistic religious communities, in other words, were not distinguished by their concealment of mystery secrets but by their silence, not by *krupta* but by *arrhētos*, the "unspeakable" mystery of the mysteries.[52] Together with its synonym, *aporrhētos* (Burkert 1987, 9).[53] *arrhētos* stipulates "secrecy" as a rhetorical strategy of silence for structuring social relations, especially in religious and pedagogical contexts (Bellman 1984, 50). As such it belongs, along with *parrhē-*

50 For the classical references to the Pythagorean five-year period of silence, see Delatte 1922, 111, n. 8). On the pedagogical implications of this period of silence, see de Vogel (1966, 188). On Pythagorean silence generally, see de Vogel (1966, 64, 189), Burkert (1972, 178–179; 1985, 302–304). The Pythagorean societies also set aside a period of instruction following their evening common meal (Iamb. *VP* 99–100). On the Pythagorean *akousmatikoi*, see Burkert (1972, 192–208).

51 The relationship of secrecy and pedagogy is also a characteristic of the rabbinic tradition. In the words of Gerd A. Wewers: "*alle esoterischen Maßnahmen enthalten das Bestreben, das rabbinische Lehrer-Schüler-Verhältnis zu stabilisieren*" (1975, 259).

52 For references, see Burkert (1987, 9: notes 44, 46), with which Paul's "*arrēta hrēmata* which it is not lawful for a man to speak" (2 Cor. 12:4) must also be counted. (On the translation of *ouk exon anthrōpō latēsai,* see Plummer 1956, 345.)

53 As with *arrhētos,* the Kpelle word for "secrecy," *ifa mo,* translates literally: 'you cannot tell it' (Bellman 1984, 43).

sia, the right of free speech claimed by all Athenians (E. *Hipp.* 422–423, *Ion* 669–675; PL *R.* 557b) and, in the conclusion of Peter Brown, that "most enviable prerogative to which an inhabitant of the later [Roman] empire could aspire" (Brown 1989 [1971], 101) to the discursive strategy of social formation in the Hellenistic world generally, and to its religious communities specifically (suggested with respect to the mystery cults by Burkert 1987, 79).

Discourse and Disclosure

As discursive formations, secrets are structured in such a way that they can be disclosed (Bellman 1984, 75). To the rhetoric of secrecy, in other words, belong communal claims of truth to be spoken obscurely, or to be spoken not at all (Eco 1992, 30). In contrast to mystical or experiential views of religion which maintain that the "essence of a mystery…cannot be communicated, but only realized" (Bolle 1987, 6)[54] the rhetoric of secrecy has to do precisely with a collective structuring of discourse. As such, it offers, according to Simmel, a "seductive temptation to break…[existing social] barriers" (Simmel 1950, 466).

If the mystery cults are characterized by a discourse of silence, the Christians and Gnostics, regardless of their sociological status,[55] increasingly represented a culture of writing.[56] To our knowledge, the Hellenistic mystery cults, like the private clubs known from reference and inscription, neither produced nor possessed any mystery writings—for the "living" in any case[57]—assuming that the hieroglyphic texts of the Isis cult referred to by Apuleius were cult objects and not doctrinal tomes (Apul. *Met.* 11.22).[58] The portrayal of scrolls being read by a naked boy on the left wall of the Dionysian Fresco in the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii and being carried by Magi on the walls of the Mithraeum at Dura Euro-

54 Poland (1909, 7) emphasizes that it was rare for any club to have any mystical character.
55 "[F]or the fundamental, institution-building activity to take place," Brian Stock argues, previous experience, both social and intellectual, in a community developing literate sensibilities, must be rendered as a "text," which, at that point, stands at the nexus of thought and action, whether it exists in written form, or, having been internalized, is merely presented verbally (1983, 101).
56 Similarly, "[d]ie Phänomene der rabbinischen Geheimhaltung stellen sich nicht begrifflich, wohl aber primär sprachlich dar, insofern der Gegenstand dieser Untersuchung sich nur in schriftlichen Textzeugen präsentiert" (Wewers 1975, 190).
57 The Greek Magical Papyri were most likely part of funerary deposits (Betz 1986, xlii–xliii), as were the Bacchic gold leaves (Zuntz 1971, 277–343; Burkert 1985, 293–295).
58 See the discussion by J. Gwyn Griffiths (1975, 285). On the conventional nature of such books in Hellenistic cult, see Jonathan Z. Smith (1978, 176–177).

pas may be understood analogously as belonging to an archaizing *topos* of cultic iconography (Brashear 1992, 51 and literature cited in note 53),[59] and not as portraying an emblem of cult content as often interpreted (e. g., Zuntz 1963, 181).[60] Similarly, the recently published fragment of a Mithraic codex from Egypt has been tentatively identified as a "*pre*-initiatory catechism" (Brashear 1992, 45 – 46, emphasis mine). By contrast, those in the gnostic milieu who reveled in their claims to secret discourse and doctrine are known primarily from their writings, a literary tradition of inscription and collection commended, for example, in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (*PMG*. 401 – 444). Whereas the meaning of ritual procedures arise from performance, the emergence of what Brian Stock has termed "textual communities," increasingly transforms enacted meaning into doctrinal norms (Stock 1983, 9), to be codified in the interpretative authority of written texts (on relationship between text and interpretation, see Stock 1983, 11). When textual traditions begin to emerge—from the second century C.E. in the West, according to Stock (1983, 19 – 30)[61]—even oral cultures effectively begin to function within a universe of discourse governed by them (Stock 1983, 3). The normative discourse generated by the availability of literary precedent not only produces new social relationships but restructures existing ones (Stock 1983, 4). Consequently, the "rhetorical use of mystery metaphor," to which Burkert calls our attention as reflecting some sort of underlying phenomenon (Burkert 1987, 80; see also 78 – 80), must itself be considered to become the phenomenon. The ancient Eleusinian injunction against speaking the mysteries (*H. Cer.* 478 – 479), for example, may be understood in this rhetorical sense as the likely basis for later literary attributions of this mystery "formula" to Bacchic and Isiac contexts as these cults became transformed into mysteries on the Eleusinian model (E. *Ba*. 472; Apul. *Met*. 11. 23);[62] and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which

59 It might prove constructive to consider the "sealed scroll" referred to in Rev. 5 in this regard.

60 This is not to question the existence of temple libraries, especially in the context of Egyptian cult, which contained, however, books of prayer (e. g., Apul. *Met*. 11.17) or testimony (*aretai*, e. g., Aristid. *Or.* 8.54) but not "mystery texts" proper (see MacMullen 1981, 11 and n. 50).

61 This dating is supported by Michael Greenwald's (1989) thesis of a general literary "consolidation of knowledge" in the Mediterranean world during this century.

62 Burkert refers to "the seminal role of Eleusis in the institution and designation of the mysteries" (*1987*, 9)—the Eleusinian mysteries themselves being a later formation on earlier Athenian cult practice, if Clinton's compelling argument be accepted (1992, 29 – 35). See Lucian's account of the creation of mysteries by Alexander of Abonoteichus modeled upon those of Eleusis (Lucianus, *Alex*. 38). For the suggestion that the worship of Asclepius at Epidauros was modelied on Eleusinian cult practice, see Garland (1992, 124). Compare also the dependence of the Hellenistic Isis and Osiris myth as recounted by Plutarch on aspects of the Demeter myth as preserved in her "Homeric Hymn," for example, the account of the wandering and disguised Isis

is careful to distinguish between revelation *ek phōnēs hē krubēn,* a distinction between secret and public knowledge (*CH* 13.1), may itself be reconsidered as something like the "literary mystery" (*Lese-Mysterium*) Reitzenstein judged it to be (1978 [1926], 51–52, 62). As Umberto Eco has more recently observed, "Hermetic thought transforms the whole world theatre into a linguistic phenomenon" (Eco 1992, 32).[63]

In the suggestion of Simmel, the act of writing itself is, at least in principle, an act of publication (Simmel 1950, 352), an irony of disclosure already pondered in the Platonic tradition (PL 2 *Ep.* 314C),[64] as later by the Hermetic Asclepius (CH 16.2).[65] Like secrecy, such literary productions create their own alternative world (Garland 1992, 154),[66] and such textual societies, from Marcionites to Manichaeans, reviled and rejected the external world which represented, from their perspective, a universe of diminished literacy beyond their own revelatory texts (Stock 1983, 90). They did not, however, fear this world like the local associations and oral cultures they replaced.[67] Rather than cowering within the protective embrace of secret enclaves, the goal of such textual societies was nothing

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who, having secured a position as nursemaid for the Queen of Byblos, attempted to burn away her child's mortality (Plu, *Is. et Os.* 15–16) and the parallel story of Demeter as recounted in her "Homeric Hymn" (*H. Cer.* 224–247, see now Clinton, 31–32); further the linking of civilization to cultivation by Osiris as reported by Plutarch (*Is. et Os.* 13) and its relations to the agrarian mission to the nations by the Eleusinian hero, Triptolemos, has, apart from vague references to the common motifs of "culture bringers," not been fully explored.

63 Søren Giversen (1988, 49–54), on the other hand, has argued for the possibility of Hermetic communities.

64 "[I]t is not possible that what is written down should not get divulged," (pseudo-) Plato writes. "The greatest safeguard is to avoid writing and to learn by heart." This counsel, of course, is delivered by letter, concerning which its author advises: "read…[it] repeatedly, then burn it up" (PL 2 *Ep.* 314C). This advice is an issue of pedagogy, however, rather than a strategy for protecting secrets or mysteries; fundamental philosophical truths, because of their complexity and profundity, should not be divulged "to uneducated people" (*eis anthrōpous apaideutous*) (PL 2 *Ep.* 314 A). On the authenticity of this letter, see Bury (1989, 399).

65 In order to preserve "the mysteries" from the Greeks, Asclepius counsels that his "summary" of the Hermetic discourses not be translated from the Egyptian (CH 16.1–2), even though this advice, like all of the Hermetic literature, was both composed and transmitted in Greek.

66 In the argument of Stock, "Understanding heresy and reform…as both historical and social phenomena, must go beyond doctrinal questions and come to grips with the transformative power of…'writings,' together with the role of hermeneutics and interpretation" (Stock 1983, 101).

67 The sense of superiority to the world resulting in its rejection *en principe,* addresses "[o]ne of the most puzzling paradoxes of Manichaean thought," which, according to Sarah and Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "is the contradiction between the perception of the material world as the work, or at least the realm, of the evil power, and a radical inability to overcome, in imagery and mythology, the world of senses" (Stroumsa and Stroumsa 1988, 43).

less than the militant mastery and domination of the entire universe (Rudolph 1983, 265–266), one of the reasons, perhaps, that Manichaeism was viewed with such suspicion by the established empires of Rome and China but was embraced, initially at least, by the ascendant empire of Sassanian Persia. "For," according to the Cologne Mani Codex, should "[the whole world] and all people obey ['the hidden and secret things revealed to Mani but...manifested through (his) hands...to (all) eyes' (36.1–13)]," he "would be able...to enrich them and establish Wisdom as sufficient for the entire world" (68.5–69.8). "Gnosticism," in Eco's conclusion, "is not a religion for slaves but one for masters" (Eco 1992, 36). And Christians, who had initially demonized a world of adversarial others (Just. 2 *Apol.* 6), came to employ *parrhēsia* (Col. 2:15; *Mart, Poly.* 10:1; Eus. *Eccl. 5.2.4*),[68] along with exorcism,[69] to establish their own catholicity.

With the forthright publication of their secret discourses by the Hermetic, Gnostic and Christian communities, doomsday loomed near, indeed, for those clubs and cults of the Hellenistic world whose social definition and maintenance yet rested upon localized strategies of secrecy and exclusion. And when one of these cultic claims to an identifying revelation came to define the dominant and inclusive cultural reality, exclusivist claims to sacrality became reimagined as the esoteric contents of traditions past.[70] Occluded by a regnant Christianity, it is precisely the Hermetic and Gnostic heritage that produced for Western culture its "syndrome of the secret" (Eco 1992, 38).

The Syndrome of the Secret: A Theoretical Postscript

There is a consensus among social scientists, as among humanists, that human beings are social creatures, and innately so. As such, all human culture is characterized by social formation, and the process of social formation is a process of defining social boundaries, of establishing parameters of inclusion and exclusion. If claims to secrecy, the English sense of which is derived from *secernere*,

68 On the Christian attitude of separation from the world, see Brown (1989 [1971], 116); on Christian *parrhēsia*, see especially Mk. 8:32 in contrast to 8:30; Jn. 7:4; 15:25; 18:20; Eph. 6:19; on Col. 2:15, see H. Schlier, *TWNT* 8, 882; on the role *of parrhēsia* in the establishment of the Christian empire, see Brown (1992, 106–117, 144).

69 Brown: "[H]owever many sound social and cultural reasons the historian may find for the expansion of the Christian Church, the fact remains that in all Christian literature from the New Testament onwards, the Christian missionaries advanced principally by revealing the bankruptcy of...the demons, through exorcisms and miracles of healing" (1989 [1971], 55).

70 See Eliade (1960, 203). For this process in the Hellenistic period, see J.Z. Smith, "The Temple and the Magician" (1978, 187); for eighteenth-century Freemasonry, see Jacob (1991, 42).

"to separate," or, "divide off" (*OED*, s.v.), are best understood as one such "calculus of social differentiation" (Whiteley (1987, 704), how then did secrecy come to be judged by historians of religion to be a central feature specifically of religious groups?[71]

I should like to suggest that the sensationalizing of secrecy as a category of religious explanation has its own, yet unwritten, intellectual history about which I should like to offer, in conclusion, but a few brief observations.

The academic study of religion is a child of the Enlightenment (Smith 1982, 22–23), and has inherited such of its values as individualism, voluntarism, and "a new respect for private and informal activity" (Roberts 1972, 17).[72] The modern emergence of private or secret societies, preeminently Freemasonry, which gave expression to these values in the face of an antecedent political absolutism and ecclesiastical confessionalism, was not only bound up with the realization of a civil or public society (Habermas 1989, 50–52; Jacob 1991, 3–22), but provided the basis for a widespread conviction of European thought, culminating in the nineteenth century, that much of what had happened in the world, "from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the Russian Revolution," only occurred "because secret societies planned it so" (Roberts 1972, 2, 11). As characterized by one historian, this *mentalité* assumed that

> there is an occult force operating behind the seemingly real outward forms of...life. No discovery, no penetrations of the veils of secrecy can ever be assured to have revealed the full truth (Roberts 1972, 15),

—a view of history recently fictionalized by Umberto Eco in his extraordinary novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*.[73] This generalized acceptance of secret forces operating in history shaped also nineteenth-century theories of religion.

Under the influence of the nascent discipline of anthropology, theological concerns with primordial revelation were replaced with "scientific" assumptions about the natural or vegetative origins of religion comparable to other "primitive rites" (Richardson 1974, 13). These original or primordial truths were, in the view

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71 The modern view of "mystery" as essential to all religion seems to go back to Nathan Söderblom (1915), and is cited approvingly by van der Leeuw, (1938, 4, 2). More recently, see Bolle, "Introduction" and "Secrecy in Religion" (1987, x-xvi, 1–24): "All people are religious" (p. x)..."Not only is there no religion without secrecy, but there is no human existence without it" (p. 2).

72 See now the discussions and wealth of information on these topics (Chartier 1989).

73 For the historical development of the occultist *mentalité* suggested here, see, in addition to Roberts and Jacob, Carlo Ginzburg, who associates the development of this view of historical secrecy also with religious developments (1976).

of students of perennial philosophy and esotericism, held to have been concealed by a positivist practice of occultation (Faivre 1987), or considered by comparative religionists, by G. G. Creuzer and Friederich Schelling, for example, to be preserved in mythology, quintessentially that of *das Volk*, but now obscured by an accumulation of historical and cultural detritus.[74] Charles William Heckethorn, for example, writes characteristically in his history of *The Secret Societies of all Ages and Countries* (1875, rev. 1897) that

> Religion has had its secret societies from the most ancient times; they date, in fact, from the period when the *true religious knowledge*—which, be it understood, consisted in the knowledge of the constitution of the universe and the Eternal Power that had produced, and the law that maintained it, possessed by the first men began to decay among the general mass of mankind (Heckethorn 1897, 3, emphasis mine).

The comprehension of this "true religious knowledge," Heckethorn observed ominously, is "the prerogative of the most highly developed of all races of men, viz., the Aryan races..." (Heckethorn 1897, 5–6). Further, Heckethorn, continued, that this:

> genuine knowledge was to a great extent preserved in the ancient "Mysteries," though even these were already a degree removed from the first primeval native wisdom, since they represented only the type, instead of the archetype; namely, the phenomena of outward temporal Nature, instead of the realities of the inward eternal Nature, of which this visible universe is the outward manifestation (Heckethorn 1897, 4).

Whereas the ubiquitous clubs and associations of the Hellenistic world were relegated to the status of "undeveloped form[s] of the specifically religious organization" (Wach 1931, 115) the mystery religions, to which primitive vegetative origins had been attributed (Saloman Reinach, e. g., 1930 [1907]), were judged by comparison to have sprung from "genuine religious impulses" (Wach 1931, 120). Influenced further by a nineteenth-century theory of religion grounded, from Schleiermacher to Otto, in the central Protestant insistence on the inward experience of grace (Martin 1993, 76–78), these "religious impulses" were consequently romanticized as the epitome of "high" (i. e., Protestant-like) religion, as paradigms of religious expression in the Hellenistic world (e. g., Eliade 1982, 208, 277), which provided a pagan preparation for the acceptance of Christianity (e. g., Poland 1909, 36). As Lewis Farnell concludes of the Orphic societies, for example:

74 See J.E. Sandys (1908, III: 66–67; 1956–65, V: 990).

> We discern in these mystic brotherhoods the germs of a *high religion* and the prevalence of conceptions that may have even contributed something to the later European ideals of private and personal morality (Farnell 1911, 123, emphasis mine).

And Samuel Angus concludes that the mystery initiation, "if too often of a ceremonial and external character, was, *as in the religion of Israel*, a step toward a *spiritual* outlook" (1975 [1928], 78, emphases mine). I should like to suggest, in other words, that a theoretical prominence attributed to secrecy in religion generally, and in the Hellenistic mystery cults especially, is a consequence of eighteenth-century intellectual and theological formulations which, shaped by a nineteenth-century Romantic *mentalité*, still governs the modern academic study of religion.[75]

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75 In contrast to the implied obsolescence of Romanticism for the modern study of religion suggested here, Kees Bolle (1989) argues the *necessity* for maintaining such an impulse in its study.

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10. The Anti-Individualistic Ideology of Hellenistic Culture

> [N]o individual is capable of creating a fully originally gesture, belonging to nobody else...- nor can it even be regarded as that person's instrument; on the contrary, it is gestures that use us as their instruments, as their bearers and incarnations.
>
> Milan Kundera (1991, 7)

Historical generalizations are invariably shaped by modern cultural values. One of the dominant values of modern Western culture is individualism, the origins of which tend to be claimed by historians for their own domains of research, with examples extending from sixth-century B. C. Greece through modern Europe. The generalization about a Hellenistic period of history, first made in the nineteenth-century, clearly reflects this value of individualism which became, consequently, part of the scholarly convention about the culture of this period. With reference to the thought, religious practice, and material culture of the period, this article argues to the contrary that neither Hellenistic idea nor ideal can be held to value in any way an individualistic view of the self. Alexander the Great and the Athenian general Alcibiades were typical examples of individualism taken to task by philosophers. Hellenistic ethics seem, rather, to have been dominated by a social principle of "Socratic care." Similarly, Hellenistic religions, including the early Christian associations, defined their raison d'être on the basis of distinctive social claims. One Christian tradition even explicitly employed the Hellenistic ethical principle of "Socratic care" as its distinctive criterion. Finally, the well-known Hellenistic terracotta figurines, often adduced as examples of Hellenistic individualism, were, in fact, mass-produced and were employed in ritual, i. e., collective, contexts. Whereas the socio-political transformations that characterize Hellenistic culture did challenge traditional collective bases for identity, the intellectual, religious and artistic expressions of this culture all confirm an anti-individualistic character for the alternative social strategies of identity produced during this period.

At one point in the 1973 Monty Python film *The Life of Brian*, the hapless hero of the title, having been mistaken for the Messiah, attempts to persuade his resolute disciples that they need not depend on him, or on anyone else: "You don't need to follow me. You don't need to follow anybody," Brian implores. "You've got to think for yourselves. You're all individuals." As in some Durkheimian nightmare, the crowd concurs with one voice: "Yes, we're all individuals" (Chapman *et al.* 1979, 46).

This ironic exchange poses the perennial question of the relationship between self and society. Is the self to be understood, ideally, as an autonomous

subject, or is the identity of the self in reality a social construct contingent upon its membership in some corporate body? I should like to argue that Monty Python's parodic portrayal of an individualistic assertion rejected by the affirming discourse of a collective subject accurately captures a central feature, at least, of Hellenistic culture. I should like to argue this thesis by taking note of the criteria employed in the periodization of a Hellenistic era in the first place, and then turn to a consideration of the individual in this period: in its thought, its religion, and its material culture.

Individualism and Hellenistic Periodization

In historiography, as in popular culture, the representation of others, of those removed from ourselves in time as by geography, invariably involves an interpretative imposition of one's own cultural values upon ideologically muted subjects. That individualism is a dominant value of modern Western culture, cannot be gainsaid. Its origins, consequently, tend to be claimed by historians and anthropologists for their own domains of research. The individual was discovered, we have been assured:

> by the lyric poets [of sixth century B.C. Greek]...; or by Plato, with his portrait of Socrates;[76] or in the Hellenistic age; or by the Roman poets; or by the Antonines; or by Augustine. Perhaps he had been there all the time, lurking in Homer's Achilles and Odysseus. Still, he had evidently fled away again by the early Middle Ages, only to be rediscovered first in [the eleventh or the twelfth century]...; then, according to Burckhardt's famous analysis, in Renaissance Italy; then again in the sixteenth, or seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries (Pelling 1990, V).[77]

Additionally, the origins of individualism have been identified with the emergence of chieftainships out of the kinship collectivities of traditional societies (Sagan 1985, 301; following on this point, Durkheim 1933, 195), argued for one of the most corporate of peoples, the Israelites of the Deuteronomic period

76 —or with the anticipation of the intellectual formulations of Socrates by the healing practices of Aesclepius, introduced into Attica in 420 BC (Garland *1992*, 134).

77 For the argument for the origins of individualism in the Middle Ages, Pelling cites Morris (1972); during the Renaissance: Burckhardt (1975 [1860]); in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries: Trilling (1972), to which we might add Berman (1970); in the eighteenth century: Woolf (1931) and K. Marx (1978, 222–223); for "6th century" Greek lyric poetry, though not cited by name: Snell (1982 [1953]).

(von Rad 1962, I:226, n 85; 443, n 7; see 391–401),[78] and claimed, of course, for early Christianity, that first-century array of cultic fragility which has had to bear the weight of so much that Western culture came to value (e.g., Dumont 1982 and Pagels 1988, 96; for recent bibliography but somewhat ambivalent argument, see Stroumsa 1990). The "individual," as one recent commentator has concluded is a very "slippery figure" (Pelling 1990, V).

One reason the individual has remained so lubricious is that historical scholarship too often confounds a social acknowledgement of individuals—even a concern with their well-being—with the social valuing of individuals above the collective of which they are members. Consequently, we may note Louis Dumont's useful differentiation between the "empirical" individual, as he terms those samples of mankind found in all societies as the "subject of speech, thought, and will,"[79] and an "ideological" individual*ism*, a valuing of "the independent, autonomous, and thus essentially nonsocial moral being, who carries...[the] permanent values" of culture (Dumont 1986, 25).[80] It is, in other words, not the particularity of unitary existence but its approbation that provides the condition for taking special notice of the individual in the first place.

The English speaking world seemed unconcerned with ideological "individualism" until after 1840 when Henry Reeve first coined the term in his translation of Alexis de Tocqueville's famous observations on *Democracy in America* (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v.). In this work, first published in 1835, the intrepid French investigator of nineteenth-century American culture observed that "individualism is a novel expression, to which a novel idea [democracy] has given

78 But Neusner (1986) argues that in Judaism, "the individual's life always is lived with the people."

79 For a discussion of individualistic expression in Stoic thought, for example, see Engberg-Pedersen (1990). I am indebted to Professor Engberg-Pedersen for calling my attention to his most interesting article.

80 Dumont's distinction between "individual" and the "ideology of individualism" is based in the French tradition of sociology beginning with Émile Durkheim (e.g., Durkheim 1975 [1898], and specially, the work of Durkheim's nephew, Marcel Mauss (Dumont 1986, 1; see also 1–8, 183–201). Although not specifically referred to by Dumont, Mauss' article, "Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: La notion de personne, celle de 'moi'" (Mauss 1985 [1938]) is fundamental. Here Mauss first distinguished between "individual" as the empirical object of observation and "person" as the construct of cultural and historical context. It is the "system of ideas and values current in a given social milieu" that Dumont refers to as an "ideology" (Dumont 1986, 9). The "ideology of individualism," then, refers to those social constructs which value the individual (or the person) above the collective. In addition to the discussions, both theoretical and historical, by Dumont and by Carrinthers-Collins-Lukes based on the distinction between the empirical individual and its individualistic construction, see also Lukes (1973) *and* Kippenberg *et al.* (1990).

birth" (de Tocqueville 1900, II.2.2: 104). Reeve felt constrained to append an apologetic note to his introduction of this English neologism: "However strange it may seem to the English ear," he wrote, "I know of no English word exactly equivalent to" the French word *individualisme*—itself a term of nineteenth-century coinage.[81]

At about the same time that de Tocqueville was extolling the value of individualism for the American experiment, the German historian, J.G. Droysen, was "inventing" the Hellenistic age. Unacknowledged from antiquity through the Enlightenment, Droysen's new periodization, itself a species of historical generalization, reflected the historicistic values of its nineteenth-century definition (Carr 1961, 76; Finley 1963, 19–35, esp. 23). The criteria for historiography during this century had been influenced by the emergence of nationalism and the subsequent founding of national archives, which supplied the recently established profession of history with a trove of newly consolidated, if politically oriented, sources. Human history became structured, consequently, primarily in terms of political change, organized around the foundational acts of its governing and military figures. This so-called "Great Man" view of history—what undergraduates sometime refer to as "kings and things"—was systematically formulated by Thomas Carlyle in his treatment of "the heroic in history," published in 1840, the same year as the English translation of de Tocqueville (Carlyle 1956 [1840]; see Stover 1972). It is understandable, then, that Droysen defined his new Hellenistic period as extending from the military conquests of one "great" individual, Alexander of Macedonia, to that of another, Octavian, who incorporated the remainder of Alexander's former empire into that of Rome with his victory over Egypt in 31 B.C., and who subsequently received from the Roman Senate the title of "Augustus."[82]

The first of Droysen's three-volume *Geschichte des Hellenismus*, published in 1836, begins with the now famous words: "*Der Name Alexander bezeichnet das*

81 Steven Lukes, *Individualism*, 3–16; *individualisme* was derived in turn from the adjective, *individuel*, documented since 1490: *Grand Larousse de la langue française* (Paris: Librairie Larousse), 4 (1975): s.v.

82 Whatever the validity of dating the conclusion of a Hellenistic period of *political* history with Octavian's conquest of Egypt, the periodization of cultural history, of the history of thought, of religion, of art, simply does not conform to the relatively sudden transformations of power associated with military conquest. I do not, consequently, date the conclusion of a Hellenistic *cultural* period with the reign of Augustus and the beginning of a new with that "Great Man" born, according to the Gospel attributed to Luke, during his reign (Lk. 2:1), but with the establishment of Christianity as the new house of culture in the West, the *terminus a quo* of which may be marked by the edicts of Theodosius prohibiting paganism in the final decade of the fourth century A.D.

Ende einer Weltepoche, den Anfang einer neuen" (Droysen 1980, I, 3). Most of the known world, and some beyond, had succumbed to Alexander's military advances by the time of his death at the age of thirty-three. This young king had more or less successfully transformed the socio-political world from its *polis* ideal, in which each city-state was expected to be autonomous and self-sufficient, to a competitive but interdependent network of ecumenical empire.[83]

Alexander's conquests and the consequent political internationalism they established generated the conditions, it is generally held, for the emergence of individualism, a remarkably timed occurrence given the "invention" of this allegedly seminal cultural period only in the nineteenth century. In the words of W. W. Tarn: "Man as a political animal, a fraction of the *polis* or self-governing city state, had ended with [Alexander's teacher] Aristotle; with Alexander begins man as an individual" (Tarn 1961, 193; 79)—a perceived shift from the self-sufficiency of the *polis* to that of the individual, in the view of political theorist, George Sabine (Sabine and Thorsen 1973, 125–132). More recently, J. Gwyn Griffiths has elaborated this truism of Hellenistic existence with reference to the sense of personal insignificance supposedly engendered by the conquests of Alexander, which "threw the citizens back on their own spiritual resources so that their concerns as individuals counted correspondingly by more" (Griffiths 1989, 238). Most recently, Peter Green has concluded similarly that "cities and empires had become too vast and heterogeneous to give adequate psychological support to inheritors of the old, local *polis* tradition: their society was no longer either integrated or manageable." Like Griffiths, Green concludes with the now formulaic axiom that "the individual was thrown back on himself" (Green 1990, 587).

Roughly concurrent with Alexander's conquests, by which Droysen defined the Hellenistic world, a cosmological revolution was constructing a greatly expanded architecture of the physical world. This new cosmological image was to be given systematic formulation in the second century A. D. by Claudius Ptolemy, after whom it was subsequently named. In contrast to the traditional "three-storied" image of antiquity, in which an overarching heaven gave sanction to localized socio-political organization, the Ptolemaic cosmology differentiated a system of seven planetary spheres, all of which embraced the terrestial globe, a cosmological representation of universalism correlate to the international realignment of Hellenistic power. Just as the borders and battlements of empire

83 Whereas the polis *ideal* was challenged, the practical effectiveness of this political unit continued to be felt throughout the Hellenistic period; see Erich S. Gruen, "The Individual and the Hellenistic Community," presentation to a symposium "The Individual and the Cosmos in the Hellenistic World," 9 February 1991, The College at New Paltz.

guarded against the ambitions of barbarians from without, so the hierarchical planetary enclaves of the cosmos, themselves bounded by the finite sphere of the fixed stars, protected against the incursion of cosmic chaos from beyond. This newly expanded cosmos, guided by immense forces of which the individual had little understanding and less control, reinforced the effects of Hellenistic internationalism, it is argued, in its production of individualism (Jonas 1963, 5–7, 241–65).

Although the cultural transformations that marked a Hellenistic age may have occasioned a heightened awareness of the empirical individual, any valuing of such an existence, I should like to argue, was imputed by the modern values of a nascent historical discipline which periodized a Hellenistic era in the first place. Neither Hellenistic idea nor ideology can be held in any way to value such an existence; "individuality itself had no importance," is the stark conclusion of one historian about Hellenistic thought (Rist 1982, 147), to which we now turn.

The Individual in Hellenistic Thought

De Tocqueville distinguished his modern, democratic notion of individualism from egotism,[84] an expression that Reeve had no problem rendering into English, for egotism, according to the Frenchman, is "a vice as old as the world" (de Tocqueville 1900, II. 2.2: 104). Whether as old as the world, it is at least as old as the Hellenistic world, and its chief exemplar, according to the second century A. D. Roman historian, Arrian, was Alexander. Attempting to correct the excesses of his predecessors (Tarn 1970), Arrian wrote of Alexander, who had been romanticized in antiquity as in modernity,[85] that the renowned leader:

> had no lack of grandeur or ambition: he would never have remained idle in the enjoyment of any of his conquests, even had he extended his empire from Asia to Europe and from Europe to the British Isles. On the contrary, he would have continued to seek beyond them for unknown lands, as it was ever his nature, if he had no rival, to strive to better his own best (*Anab.* 7.1.4).

A student of the Stoic philosopher, Epictetus, Arrian concluded of such unbridled ambition that "none of these things…can make a man happy, unless he

84 Employed pejoratively, *individualisme* has the sense of "tendency towards egotism" (Balzac [1839]; *Grand Larousse*, s.v.).

85 See for example, the popular *Alexander Romance*, falsely attributed to Callisthenes, now in new translation by Ken Dowden in Reardon (1989, 650–735).

can win one more victory in addition to those the world thinks so great—the victory over himself" (*Anab.* 4.7.5; de Selincourt 1971, 349, 213).

Alexander seemed to be a *topos* in Hellenistic literature not only for egotism but for the absence of self-knowledge (Wilkins 1980 [1917], 18, 41). Reportedly, this "most ambitious of men" (*anthrōpōn philotimotatos*) (Dio Chrys., *Or.* 4.4) once inquired of Diogenes what military achievements were necessary in order for him to become the best of kings, a question about how best to govern others born out of the practical concerns of empire, that is, simultaneously, a question about how best to govern oneself. In the reply recorded by Dio Chrysostom, a variant of some twenty-two references to an exchange between the two (Hamilton 1971, 350 n. 4), the Cynic philosopher replies that "you are your own worst enemy...For no foolish and wicked man understands himself, else Apollo would not have enjoined this first of all for each of us to know oneself" (*gnōnai heauton*) (*Or.* 4.56 – 7).

Alcibiades, another character familiar from ancient literature for his military and political exploits, is reported to have received the same advice from Socrates. The supposed dialogue, known as the *Alcibiades I* and attributed to Plato, is a virtual treatise upon the Greek injunction to "know yourself" (Wilkins 1980 [1917], 18). Like the young Alexander who reportedly had confronted his ambitions when he succeeded to the Macedonian throne at the age of twenty, Alcibiades appears in this dialogue at the outset of his own public and political life when he was not yet twenty (123D). He is dissatisfied with his privileges of birth and heritage and, like Alexander, desires to gain power throughout the world (105C). But Socrates demonstrates to Alcibiades that his political agenda is based upon the conventional knowledge shared by those in the Athenian society he hopes to lead (103 – 114). But whereas Alcibiades may not be particularly disadvantaged with respect to his political peers, his real competitors are the kings of Sparta and Persia whose superiority of education, wealth, and authority Socrates details at length. To realize his ambition, Alcibiades must improve himself not only by knowing more than his countrymen, but by understanding more than his foreign competitors as well. He may achieve this goal, according to Socrates, by heeding the Delphic maxim to "know yourself" (124B). By knowing himself, Alcibiades will come to know the proper affairs of others and thereby the political affairs of state (133D-134 A). In response to Alcibiades' query about how he might achieve this self-knowledge (124D), Socrates responds that he would come to know himself if he "took care of himself" (*epimelēsthai sauton:* 127E). For, by taking care of himself, Socrates assures Alcibiades, he shall come to know himself (132D).

The relationship between taking care of oneself and political activity is based upon the traditional Greek proverb, first documented by Herodotus, that

those who best take care of their own affairs will best take care of the affairs of the city (Hdt. 5.29; see also Thucyd. 2.40.2; 6.9.2; Pl., *Prot*. 318E). Thus, in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates defends himself as a master of "taking care of the self" (*epimeleia heautou*), for in teaching people to occupy themselves with themselves, he teaches them to occupy themselves with the city (*Apol*. 29E). Based in political concerns, Socratic "care," and with it knowledge of oneself, was a communal injunction (Schroeder 1989, 347).

The Stoics and the Neo-Platonists, the two dominant Hellenistic philosophical traditions, agreed upon the foundational nature of the *Alcibiades* dialogue for their own philosophical enterprise, and upon its subject, the relationship between care of oneself and self-knowledge, for philosophical thought (Wilkins 1980 [1917], 66). The Stoics considered self-knowledge to be not only the beginning of philosophy but the sum of it (e.g., Jul., *Or*. 6. 185D). Similarly, the neo-Platonic philosopher, Proclus, wrote in his *Commentary* on the *Alcibiades I*, that "knowledge of oneself was the foundation of philosophy and of Platonic thought." He reports further that Iamblicus gave the *Alcibiades I* the first place in the ten dialogues in which he considered the entire philosophy of Plato to be contained (Procl. *in Alc*. 11).[86] The Platonic argument for the existence of a *psyche* within each of us is not in reference to *my* soul, but to *the* soul, as Jean-Pierre Vernant has emphasized. His notion of "the individual soul…does not convey a man's individual psychology but rather the aspiration of an individual subject," Dumont's empirical individual, "to become one with the all, reintegrated into the general cosmic order" (Vernant 1991, 330), an order that structured and included the social world. As Louis Gernet concludes—if we may excuse the non-inclusive language of an earlier era:

> The mental universe [of Hellenic humanism], which corresponds to a "political" society wherein the unifying principle is that of the abstract and interchangeable "citizen," is in fact that cosmos in which "man" find[s] his place, but in which "men" do not as readily (Gernet 1981, 12).

During the Hellenistic period, the Socratic notion of communal care became extended from being the concern of a young man to being considered a permanent duty throughout one's life, and from political relationships to encompass all human relationships (Foucault 1988, 26, 31). The Greeks, like the Romans after them, had no substantive word to indicate this "self" that they were enjoined to know and care for. They expressed this sense, rather, by the use of the reflexive pronoun: *autos* in Greek; *ipse* in Latin (Schroeder 1989, 337), introducing,

86 For the influence of the *Alcibiades* on Plotinus, see O'Daly (1973, 10 – 11).

thereby, at least two voices into a rhetoric of self. This rhetorical act of self-formation constituted what Michel Foucault has termed a "technology of the self" (Foucault 1988), whereby an intersubjective basis of identity was established (Stroumsa 1990, 49). I would agree on this point with Hannah Arendt, who observed that for the Greeks, "a life spent [outside the world of the common] in the privacy of 'one's own' (*idion*)...is 'idiotic' by definition," whereas for the Romans, such activity "offered but a temporary refuge from the business of the *res publica*" (Arendt 1959, 35, 42; see also Stock 1983, 28).

While there was most certainly an alteration in the technologies of self-formation occasioned by the intellectual transformations generated by Hellenistic culture, these technologies did not produce any ideologies of individualism. Even as the Hellenistic world retained from classical philosophy its notable lack of interest in the individual as in particularity generally (Stroumsa 1990, 27; Rist 1982, 145–153), so it retained traditional values of social identity, however redefined.

Even American culture, with its historical values of self-reliance and rugged individualism, is rife with what de Tocqueville had already described as "secondary associations" (de Tocqueville 1990, II.2.5). These special interest associations: from conchologists to nudists, often self-consciously organized as extended families, fill the void left by the erosion of traditional social groupings. As one recent observer has noted, such subcultures arise and flourish "most intensely" in places like "the condo kingdoms of coastal Florida, and in the tract-housing sprawls of Southern California," that is, "in places that lack rootedness and a sense of space" (Sides 1991; 1992, 17–18). It was a similar disintegration of the traditional locative definitions of social existence that characterized the Hellenistic world.

Those who have argued most vigorously for a Hellenistic ideology of individualism have also argued, incongruously, for a heightened, if redefined, social reality.[87] Patrick Atherton, for example, concludes that all of the Hellenistic philosophies were "concerned with the difficulty that arises for detached individuals who regard themselves as essentially separated from an order to which they nevertheless properly belong" (Atherton 1989, 332). And rather than individualism, Tarn notes the "enormous growth of non-political private associations and clubs" that followed the weakening of city ties (Tarn 1961, 93).[88] Hellenistic cul-

87 Even those who argue for the advocacy of an individualism by Plato must concede that its guarantee was the overriding *raison d'être* of the *polis:* see, for example, Hall (1963, 2, 5).

88 The classic work on the Greek associations of the Hellenistic period remains Poland (1909), summarized by Tod (1932), and in his article on "Clubs, Greek" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary (Tod 1970)*. Poland builds upon the work of Paul Foucart (1975 [1873]). On the Latin *collegia*, see

tural fragmentation did not, in other words, give rise to any ideology of individualism, but, as in contemporary Florida and California, to a plurality of alternative subcultures. These Hellenistic subcultures are well exemplified by the religious formations of the era.

The Individual and Hellenistic Religions

Alfred North Whitehead once defined religion as "what the individual does with his own solitariness" (Whitehead 1926, 6). This modern view of religion, is as pervasive as it is problematic—at least from the perspective of many recent theoretical considerations.[89] As with historical generalizations, however, the validity of

Waltzing (1895–1900). The investigations of Foucart, Poland and Waltzing were made possible by Th. Mommsen's pioneering monograph, *De Collegiis et Sodaliciis* (1843).

89 Whitehead's definition of religion, apparently influenced by that of William James, represents one of the most pervasive of modern theories of religion, namely, that all religious phenomena are based upon individual religious experiences, the paradigm of which is mysticism. The first significant *theoretical* attempt to argue this position was by Jonathan Edwards in his "Treatise Concerning Religious Affections" (1960 [1746]), which has been judged by at least one scholar of American Puritan thought to be "the most profound explanation of the religious psychology in all American literature" (Perry Miller, 1949, 177). "True religion," Edwards wrote, "consists so much in the Affections,"—a Puritan expression for feelings or experiences—"that there can be no true Religion without them" (Edwards 1960 [1746], 342). The primary "objective ground" of these Affections, he argued, "is the transcendentally excellent and amiable Nature of divine things, *as they are in themselves*" (emphasis added) (ibid. 345). For Edwards, in other words, religion was based on a pure, unmediated, personal experience of the sacred. This primary emphasis on individual experience relegates social practices of religion, like ritual, to outward—and secondary—expressions of the inward grace so important to Reformation theology. At the beginning of the twentieth century, William James defended essentially the same view of religion that had first been argued by Edwards, but now in the discourse of science – the newly defined "discipline" of psychology that James was so instrumental in popularizing. In his classic Gifford Lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James wrote that religion consists of "the feelings ... and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James 1902, 31–32). For James, as for Edwards, then, "personal religion will prove itself more fundamental than either theology or ecclesiasticism. Churches, when once established," he asserted, "live at second-hand upon tradition; but the *founders* of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their *direct personal communion with the divine*" (second emphasis added) (ibid. 31). Consequently, in the conclusion of James, "personal religious experience has it roots and centre in mystical states of consciousness" (ibid. 370). A dominant popular as well as theoretical explanation of religion is thus based in the Reformation theological tradition of a faith that is confirmed in the individual experience of grace and constructed out of a culturally disseminated and psychologized theology of revival. (See Martin 1993, 76–78).

contemporary theoretical constraints often is inappropriately assumed in assessing other peoples and periods. Nevertheless, Whitehead's apothegm is often cited as characteristic of Hellenistic religions.

Joining the ranks of such recognized scholars in the field as E. R. Dodds (1971, 243), and J. Gwyn Griffiths (1989, 238), Peter Green has most recently asserted that Whitehead's definition "offers an increasingly accurate picture" of religion during the Hellenistic centuries (1990, 588). In the altered political condition of the Hellenistic city, "the climate of religious sentiment," according to Atherton, was held to be "much influenced by the pronounced individualism characteristic of the period...It provided the necessary setting of order for the release of individuals to pursue a personal satisfaction which could no longer be confined within the culture of the ancestral community" (Atherton, 332). And Walter Burkert, in his recent monograph on the ancient mystery cults—those religious forms that are generally held to be the most distinctive of the Hellenistic period—has traced the origins of these mysteries to the "discovery of the individual" which he dates, following Bruno Snell, from sixth-century B. C. Greece (Burkert 1987, 11; following B. Snell, see Burkert, 11, n. 57).[90]

Sophocles, by contrast, at the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus*, portrayed Oedipus as a lonely wanderer who is *apopolis* "without a city" (S. *OC* 208). Later, Aristotle would insist that anyone who, like Oedipus, is *apolis*, that is, who stands alone as an individual apart from collective humanity is "either beast or god (*thērion e theon*)" (*Pol.* 1253a).[91] As might be anticipated in historical judgement, Aristotle's premise is closer to the view documented from Hellenistic religions than is Whitehead's; and nowhere is this view represented more graphically than by the theriomorphic hero of Apuleius' second-century A.D. novel, *The Golden Ass*, a morality tale that juxtaposes its lusty portrayal of everyday life in the Hellenistic world with the blessedness of a religious existence under the protection of the goddess Isis.

Apuleius' novel opens with its dubious hero, Lucius, a sort of Hellenistic Everyman, journeying to Hypata in Thessaly on business, an increasingly common activity in the context of Hellenistic internationalism. While in Hypata, Lucius is the guest of Milo, a friend of a friend from whom Lucius has a letter of introduction. Despite the protection of Milo's hospitality, Lucius nevertheless becomes inappropriately involved in the strange customs practiced in this place away from

90 See also my review of Burkert 1997 in the *Critical Review of Books in Religion* (Martin 1989, 288 – 290).

91 Plato proposed the death penalty for the establishment of private cults which, he believed, would weaken the *polis* by giving individuals the means of pursuing their own ends (*Lg.* 909 – 910).

his own city, and finds himself, as a consequence, transformed into an ass, a "wretched beast" that was associated with pretty much the same pejorative attributes in antiquity as in modernity and was considered especially detestable to the goddess Isis (*Met*. 11.6).

The *Metamorphoses*, to give the novel its classical title, is loosely constructed around the aimless wanderings of its asinine hero as he searches for a common rose, the antidote that will transform his bestial individuality into humanity. Unlike the promise of potential which characterizes the modern ideology of individualism, the only promise of individualism characteristic of Hellenistic culture was that of the social exclusion and lonely isolation exemplified by Lucius. As in the philosophical traditions, "marks of individuality" were perceived by Hellenistic religions as "signs of imperfection" to be overcome (Rist 1982, 147). Whitehead's apothegm about individual solitude, rather than characterizing Hellenistic religions, describes best what these religions saved one from.

The Hellenistic metaphor for what was considered to be the asocial, diminished state of being from which one might be saved was "wandering." The asinine hero of Apuleius' novel, as the consequence of his *curiositas* or "individualistic assertions," like Sophocles' Oedipus, became hopelessly lost in a "maze of miserable wanderings" (*Met*. 11.20) (Veyne, 1987, 231). According to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, prospective initiates into the mysteries of Demeter would, upon their arrival at the sacred *temenos* of the goddess' Eleusinian sanctuary, repeat the ancient words spoken by the goddess herself upon her own arrival at the site: "And so I wandered and am come here" (*Hymn Hom*. 133). And "the first intelligible words" of the recently published fragment of a Mithraic Catechism from Egypt "might be indicative of wandering" (Brashear 1992, 15) an image of this terrestrial state of existence (ibid. 20), while, an inscription preserved in the Walbrook Mithraeum in London promises "life to wandering humans" (Frend 1984, 276).[92]

The soteriological rose which finally marks the conclusion to Lucius' wandering is proffered by a priest of Isis during a procession in honor of the goddess. Lucius' *redieris ad homines*, "return to the human world" (*Met*. 11.6) is predicated upon his association with the society of Isis, one of the most prominent of the Hellenistic religious subcultures. Lucius' membership in the society of Isis is not the consequence of his own volition, the individualistic basis of social organization that is typically attributed to Hellenistic religions; rather, his "urgent en-

92 The inscription, *hominibus bagisbatam* (*CIMRM* 823), which should be read as *hominibus vagis vitam*, actually appears on the base of a sculpture of "Bacchus with a Satyr, a Maenad, Silenus, and Pan" that was found in the Walbrook Mithraeum. See Toynbee (1963, 128–30).

treaties" to the high priest to be initiated were met by a warning "to guard most carefully against [such] overeagerness" (*Met*. 11.21). For, according to the priest:

> the day on which each person can be initiated was marked by a nod from the goddess, and that the priest who ought to administer the rites was likewise chosen by her providence, and that even the expenses required for the ceremony were determined by a similar command (*Met*. 11.21).

Initiation into the mysteries, in other words, like membership in any Hellenistic religious group, required invitation by the deities, or, what was the same thing, by their institutional representatives—a kind of sacerdotal imperative saying "don't call us; we'll call you" (Nock 1961 [1933], 152–155). This divine call came both in waking visions, as to the Dionysian "stranger" in Euripides' *The Bacchae* or to Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3–6), or through the practice of incubation, in a dream, as to Lucius.

Lucius awaits his divine invitation to Isiac membership at a house rented for the occasion within the precincts of the Isis sanctuary at Cenchrae, the port city of Corinth. He spends his time here as "an inseparable companion of the priests" (*sacerdotum individuus*) (*Met*. 11.19). It is perhaps not too venturesome to suggest that the sense of *individuus* in this passage is that of "socialization," the process whereby a prospective member who is outside the Isiac society, that is, who is *dividuus*, becomes received as a full member, a transaction of social inclusion that culminated with the formal ceremony of initiation.

Following his initiation into the society of Isis, Lucius is finally able to return home (*Met*. 11.24), to his friends and parents (*Met*. 11.26). He now acknowledges, however, the priest of Isis as his spiritual father (*Met*. 11.26) and the universal goddess herself as his loving mother (*Met*. 11.25). These spiritually constructed kin relations replace Lucius' natural parents as the basis for the social unity of his new collective identity (Maine 1986 [1861], 152; see also 104, 213–14).[93]

Like the mystery cults, the early Christian societies also based social inclusion upon distinctive claims of spiritual kinship. In a paradigm of social reorientation and inclusion more dramatic than anything suggested for membership in the Isis cult, Jesus is portrayed by some of these first Christians as requiring the rejection of one's natural family. According to the synoptic gospels, when the claims of Jesus' family were opposed to that of political authority (Mt. 12:38; Mk. 3:6, 22), Jesus replies by suggesting a third theory of social relationship:

93 The centrality of the notion of family to social organization in antiquity was emphasized also by Maine's contemporary, Fustel de Coulanges (1979 [1873], 86, 89).

> 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Mt. 12:46 – 50//Mk. 3:31 – 35; Lk. 8:19 – 21).

Henceforth, Christianity was to be defined, according to this same tradition, as the society of those who have "left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for...[Jesus'] sake and for the gospel" (Mk. 10:29// Mt. 19:29 and Lk. 18:29). For the Jesus societies, in other words, as for other Hellenistic religious groupings, fictive kinship claims supplanted the ascription of identity by birth with a cosmopolitan ideology of acquired subcultural identity.

The anti-individualistic ideology of the early Christians is perhaps best encapsulated in their so-called "great commandment" to "love your neighbor as yourself." This social imperative is cited throughout the New Testament corpus: by the synoptic gospels (Mt. 5:43, 19:19, 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Lk. 10:27), by Paul (Rom. 12:10, 13:9; Gal. 5:14), by the traditions of James (Jas. 2:8) and John (1 Jn. 2:10, 3:10, 4:21), and even in Christian gnosticism, that supposedly most individualistic of traditions (Gos. Th. 25). The crucial question, implicit in this commandment but posed explictly only by the gospel of Luke, is: "who is [and who is not] my neighbor" (Lk. 10:29)? In response, the author of Luke relates the well-known "Story of the Good Samaritan" (Lk. 10:30 – 37). What has remained unremarked in this much analyzed parable is that the primary characteristic accorded neighborliness is *epimeleia*, precisely that criterion of Socratic care that we have seen to be so central to the social ethics of Hellenistic philosophy. The Samaritan is not only portrayed as the example of one who "took care" of the beleaguered victim in the story (*epemelēthē autou*), but as one who enjoins others also to "take care of him" (*epimelēthēti autou*) (Lk. 10:34 – 35). The point of this Lucan story, as of the "great commandment" generally, is to prescribe the priority of care for others, that is, of social claims, over any individualistic concern for the self. For these Christians, to "take care," like the ancient injunction to self-knowledge, referred "to the drawing of...social boundaries" (Stroumsa 1990, 35, 46 – 7).

No one in the New Testament is portrayed as successfully suing for membership in any of the Jesus movements apart from importunate invitation. Yet, in his study of the influence of Greek ideas on Christianity, the influential biblical scholar, Edwin Hatch, summarized Christian origins in terms of the conventional view of Hellenistic religions: "There is," he concluded "no adequate evidence that, in the first age of Christianity, association was other than voluntary. It was profoundly individual. It assumed for the first time in history the infinite worth of the individual soul" (Hatch 1891, 334). Hatch's view of the "original"

Christians, decidedly more Protestant than historical as Jonathan Z. Smith has recently argued (J. Z. Smith 1990, 59–62; Veyne 1987, 231–232), informs the work of many modern scholars who are still concerned with the question of "how the charismatic [that is, individualistic] fellowship of the apostolic Church," that "original" Christianity "rediscovered" by the Protestant reformers, "gave rise to the [corporate] bureaucracy of Roman Catholicism" (Nelson 1975, 232n).

Although Hellenistic internationalism did challenge the classical view of a collective identity conferred by one's city of origin—the view still represented by Aristotle—it did not challenge the social basis of identity by producing any ideology of individualism. Rather, it produced alternative strategies of social inclusion, strategies defined not by place of birth but by inclusion in a newly defined international plurality of social groupings in which membership was conferred by invitation and instruction (Jonas 1963, 5–6). As with his conclusions concerning Hellenistic culture generally, Green, risking self-contradiction, concludes that religion during this period represented the "urge to retreat from self-determination, to seek authority outside the self" (Green 1990, 586), and Griffiths must subsume his view of heightened individual concerns during the Hellenistic period to what he concedes is the "essentially communal" nature of religion in antiquity (Griffiths 1989, 238). Salvation, in other words, in whatever Hellenistic discourse it may be articulated, is, at base, a social status confirmed by membership in a group deemed to have the power or the authority to confer this status.

The subcultural religious groups adapted to the claims of Hellenistic cosmoplitanism in varying ways. Most of these formerly native cults adopted Greek language and culture as a technique of international communication and acceptance (see Bowersock 1990, esp. ch. 1). In addition, some, like that of Lucius' savior goddess, became universalized by elevating their deities from native soil to celestial enthronement where they might preside over their cult sites now redistributed throughout the terrestrial realm (Martin 1987, 76). The Mithraic cults even managed to preserve a remarkably uniform iconography for their numerous, wide-spread sanctuaries (Martin 1994). However, the catholicity of these internationalized native cults was, in actuality a cosmopolitan fiction, as the local determinations of cult-practices, variations in iconographic and ideological interpretation, and flexibility in the indices of membership indicate. These cults were, in other words, neither charismatic nor episcopal, but congregational. Only the ancient Mysteries of Demeter retained their locative character, requiring all who would be initiate to journey to Eleusis, despite a challenge to this privilege of place by her colonial cult in Sicily (Martin 1990, 251–261). And only the early Christians had the increasing audacity to aspire to a political realization of the

Hellenistic ideal of utopian universalism—an aspiration that eventually won them imperial sanctions.

Individualism and Material Culture

In contrast to the early Christianities, for which literary remains have survived alongside the archaeological (see Snyder 1985), many religious practices in the Hellenistic period are documented largely from their material remains. Mithraic iconography is a well-known case.[94] A less well-known example is the exquisite terracotta figurines produced during this period and found throughout Greece and Italy. These molded products of "a large-scale industry" (Wells 1970, 210; Uhlenbrock 1990, 16), are being examined by historians for what they might reveal of everyday life (Uhlenbrock 1990, *passim*), an area of historical investigation that, until recently, has been relatively neglected. However, these figurines, mass-produced in an estimated "tens of thousand" (Wells 1970, 210), are also adduced as examples of Hellenistic individualism—an expression, in the words of one art historian, of "human needs in touching portrayals of emotion."[95] Although this claim may be understandable given the individualism conventionally attributed to Hellenistic culture by its leading scholars, it is, nevertheless, as curious a conclusion as had it been made of a discarded bin of plastic Jesuses. The intent of this analogy is not to denigrate the piety expressed either through the ritual use of the Hellenistic figurines or by the placing of plastic statuettes on automobile dashboards. After all, as we have been reminded in a recent study of "The Medieval Virgin as Object," there is, in "the structure of religious belief—the structure that binds believer to object...no interest in or place given to recording anything having to do with [the] production, sales, or manufacture" of religious objects (Ziegler 1989, 257). The issue, rather, is the appropriateness of an essentially Protestant interpretation of such palpable cult objects as the outward expressions of an inward or individualistic "piety." The very ubiquity of the Hellenistic terracotta figurines, as of plastic dashboard statuettes, suggests that a more appropriate catchment in which to situate their significance might be an ideology of social inclusion rather than one of individualistic expression. Indeed, "piety" in antiquity—*eusebeia* in Greek, *pietas* in Latin—designated techniques

94 I have suggested a social interpretation of the Mithraic tauroctony (Martin 1994).

95 William Mierse, from course description of Art 282: Seminar. "Hellenistic" in "Memorandum To: Art Majors and University Advisors," From: Christie Fengler-Stephany, Chair, Art Department, dated October 31, 1990, describing "Spring 1991 Course Offerings" at The University of Vermont.

for establishing "right relationships," among humans as well as those between humans and deities.

The homes, theatres, sanctuaries and tombs which are the provenance of the terracotta figurines are all loci of pietistic strategies for establishing right relationships. I have already alluded to the centrality of household organization, that is, of kin relations, as a basis for social unity in antiquity and of subcultural formation in the Hellenistic world. Similarly, the inseparability of entertainment from ritual in Greek culture is generally conceded, and suggested for Rome.

The significant majority of the terracottas, however, "are found either as votive offerings deposited in sanctuaries, or as objects accompanying the dead into the tomb" (Bell 1990, 66; on these figurines as votive offerings, see also 38, 42, 55). Votary and funerary rites are both practiced in public, in the presence of priests and fellow worshipers, establishing bonds between the devotee and other devotees; both benefit many others who profit from the investment—craftsmen, shopkeepers, as well as all those sharing in the accompanying ritual banquets.[96] In contrast to the transitoriness of prayer and sacrifice, these practices, materialized in the terracotta figurines, represented tangible and enduring proofs for the successful strategies of piety (van Straten 1981, 74–75). Where the place of the *polis* had been challenged and in places dissolved under the influence of Hellenistic cosmopolitanism, these practices and their material mementos memorialized a collective piety that reestablished a sense of place (Rouse 1975 [1902], 357; J. Z. Smith, 1987, 129), an enduring spatial framework in which a community might distribute its richest ideas and images with respect to specific locations and sanctuaries (Halbwachs 1980, 139–40, 151).

While the practices associated with votive offerings established a material link between the new social formations and cult sites, the use of these cult objects as funerary offerings ensured that the redefined locative definitions of social existence endured over time.[97] Such acts of memoralization as represented in Hellenistic votive and funerary practices and materialized in the terracotta figurines externalized the collective memory "on a geographical plane where it... [might] visually fix and affirm collective beliefs" and identity (Hutton 1988, 314).[98] I would suggest, in other words, that such figurines might better be con-

96 Adapted from Walter Burkert's insights concerning votive practices (Burkert 1985, 14).

97 On the relationship of collective memory to cultic practices materialized by Hellenistic terracotta figurines dedicated to Attis, see J. Z. Smith (1990, 129).

98 The classic work on such externalization through commemoration is Halbwach's study of the cultural geography of the Holy Land, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Saint* (1941); see also J. Z. Smith (1987, 115–16).

sidered material tokens of inclusion and membership in an enduring subculture rather than indications of any personal or individualistic enterprise.

Conclusion

Differing claims to the origins of individualism share only the conviction of a potential for the historical construction of self as an individual and for a consequent possibility of valuing such a construction. Nietzsche was perhaps the first explicitly to argue that "every human being was a 'necessary consequence' of an almost unintelligibly complex web of factors 'assembled from the elements and influence of things past and present'" (Nietzsche 1986, 34–35 [I, §39, §41], cited in the formulation by James Miller 1993, 116). He rejected, consequently, any idea of the self as something given. "'[T]ruth,'" he concluded, "including the 'truth' about one's self, 'is not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created'" (Nietzsche 1966, 26 [§19]; 1967, 298 [§552], cited in the formulation by James Miller 1993, 69), a process of historical construction that Michel Foucault analyzed under the rubric, "technologies of the self."

We may leave it to intellectual historians to contest when an "ideal" of the individual self first became constructed from the empirical reality of unitary existence and valued differently from that of the corporate subject; and to *mentalité* historians to establish when this emergent individual became collectively valued. And we might leave it for social theorists to ascertain to what extent an ideology of individualism ever actually produces an autonomous individual subject, or whether any ideology, including this one, is not itself a social strategy of subjection.

For the Greeks and Romans, in any case, any concept approaching that of modern, Western individualism was irrelevant. Their ideas and icons, discourse and practices, acts and gestures all confirm the anti-individualistic and collective character of a shared cultural ideal—an inter-individualistic construction of self that continues to mark the traditional societies of contemporary Greece (Pollis 1965, 32; Stewart 1991, xv, 38, 87).

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11. Rationalism and Relativity in History of Religions Research

Historians of religion, in their enthusiasm to establish disciplinary autonomy, have distanced themselves from ordinary historiographical practice. As Mircea Eliade asserted programmatically in his 1951 study of shamanism, for example: "the *history* of religions is not always the *historiography* of religions" (Eliade 1964, xvi). Although Eliade acknowledged that "historical conditions are extremely important in a religious phenomenon (for every human datum is in the last analysis a historical datum)" (Eliade 1964, xiv), he argues a few pages later that "in the [*now really?*] last analysis" religious life is "ahistorical" (Eliade 1964, xix; for a discussion of Eliade's view of history, see Allen 1988). Eliade's ahistorical "phenomenological attitude" (Eliade 1964, xv) echoes Joachim Wach's observation that "phenomenology knows nothing of any historical 'development' of religion," a theoretical dictum subsequently cited approvingly by both van der Leeuw and Pettazzoni (Wach 1924, 82; van der Leeuw 1938, 688; Pettazzoni 1967, 217). Unless, however, the realities of religions be confessed as the manifest consequence of some transcendental "essence," they remain—as Eliade concluded in his initial "last analysis"—historical data, subject, thereby, to ordinary historical inquiry (Martin 1991, 120; Martin 1994a, 335). Consequently, the history of religions as an academic enterprise is, or should be, a species of general historiography and its historiographical explanations must be pursued without recourse to any *deus ex machina* (following Carr 1961, 96). As is the case with general historiography, the proper objects of the history of religions are *res gestae,* "human doings in the past," and not theological claims to hierophanous *gestae dei* that are properly the subject matter of *Heilsgeschichte* (Collingwood 1956, 9).

The more interesting issue, however, is not what should be the clear distinction between historiographical objects as *res gestae* and *gestae dei* but the distinction, first made by Hegel, between *res gestae* and the *historia rerum gestarum,* "the narration of human doings"—between, in other words, an objective and a subjective view of history (Hegel 1956 [1861], 60), rationalistic and relativistic views of history well illustrated in the theoretical differences between nineteenth-century historicism and a new, twentieth-century historicism. Whereas the old historicism emphasized an assessment of the historical data which, when sufficient and sufficiently sorted out, were understood to speak more or less for themselves, the new emphasizes the exigencies of culture, politics, and prejudice in the construction of historical narratives, often at the expense of the data.

Historicism old and new

In his review of *Not Out of Africa*, Mary Lefkowitz's challenge to the Afrocentrism occasioned by the first volume of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987), Glen Bowersock writes that:

> truth in the writing of history has come under fire repeatedly in recent years in relativist interpretations that have sometimes turned history into little more than rhetoric. The result has been a kind of collegial standoff in which anyone's views, no matter how bizarre, might be accepted as one possible way of looking at things. (1996, 7)

While an inevitability of historiographical hermeneutics is acknowledged by all historians, the posing of innovative questions generated by new theoretical formations should not abrogate the positivity of data by which the historiographical enterprise is constrained. This is the position most forthrightly set forth in the famous nineteenth-century historicist mandate to reconstruct the past "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" (von Ranke 1885, v-viii). This historicist dictum, intended to suggest that historiography properly made descriptive rather than the prescriptive or normative judgements associated with philosophy, was reshaped by the ascendency of the scientific ideal during this century into the positivistic goals often attributed a more narrow "science" of history. This objective view of historiography, which held that the past might be definitively known, contributed to the establishment of history as an academic discipline late in that century.

As a descriptive enterprise, nineteenth-century historicism stood in opposition to any metaphysical absolute of philosophy or to any transcendental norm of religion which holds human existence to be more than its circumstances. It attempted, consequently, to dissociate itself from the validity of theory, whether from the Enlightenment theory of natural law, from any universal construct of values held to be applicable to the diversity of human societies—whether taken to be of divine or human origination, or from generalizable political norms. However, readily available records of political achievement, collected in state archives that had recently been established with the emergence of European nationalism in this century, influenced a comprehensive view of human history along similar lines. This theoretical conviction concerning the relationship between political power and the shape of history came to dominate German historiography (Iggers 1983, 4).

The historicist focus on archival texts was formative in shaping a philologically grounded historicism of religion. These historians of religion, and biblical scholars especially, were concerned not only to establish the most accurate record of religious expressions but to locate their texts and subsequent commen-

taries in the appropriate historical contexts. Whereas the historical-critical investigation of biblical texts and the restriction of their meaning to their historical context challenged the transcendental authority traditionally attributed them, this work was nevertheless continued, albeit within the contraints of a politics of religious orthodoxy.

On the other hand, those historians of religion who had embraced the historicist concern with value-neutral description departed from the historical-critical method of liberal biblical scholars to argue that a historically contingent or situated view of religious phenomena could not explain their "essence," an assumed religious reality that they supposed religions really to manifest. They considered this specifically "religious" meaning to belong to a transhistorical nature of the human spirit that is best discovered by comparative and ahistorical study. These "phenomenographists" of religion joined conservative biblical theologians in rejecting historicism, along with social scientific research, as a reduction of revealed, or essential, religion to human construction.

During the final third of the twentieth century, a loose coalition of historical and anthropological scholarship emerged in France and the United States that has been termed the "new historicism."[99] This new movement shares with nineteenth-century historicism the fundamental premise that all human events and expressions are historically and socially constituted. However, in contrast to the historicists' Enlightenment faith in reason to direct and, thus, to comprehend history, the new historicists represent the Romantic view of the autonomy of history in which reason itself is understood to be a historical construct. Reason itself, located in the process upon which it reflects, is, in this view, deemed meaningful and valid only in its setting. Whereas, the historicists refused to acknowledge their own historical contingency (Iggers 1983, 17), the new historicists view all historical knowledge as relative to the standpoint of the historian.

Although historicism had understood human ideas and ideals to be historically constituted and had rejected idealist abstraction for an emphasis upon situated fact, its view that a politically shaped history was the key to knowledge tended to be all-encompassing. In contrast to the lingering Enlightenment ideal of universal human values implied in this totalizing project of the old historicism, the new historicism emphasizes a local politics of value—including especially that of the historian. Historiography cannot, in the view of the new historicists, imply social or political neutrality.

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99 The term "new historicism" was first coined by literary theorists. For a review of these issues in that context, see Winn (1993).

The focus on the political orientation of the historian by the new historicist emphasizes, in contrast to the historicist assumption of a past contingent with the present through some specified law of political change, the situated character of the past as "other" to the present. The new historicists have become allied thereby with those anthropologists who are concerned with issues of the validity and propriety of Western categories in the study of other cultures (Silk 1987; Darnton 1984, xiii, 3–7). In the words of Robert Darnton:

> this anthropological mode of history begins from the premise that individual expression takes place within a general idiom, that we learn to classify sensations and make sense of things by thinking within a framework provided by our culture. (1984, 6)

However, documentations of historically constructed distributions of power by these historians have all too often resulted in their insights being subjected to their own ideological, and often idiosyncratic, assertions of power, especially by their postmodernist representatives, especially in the contemporary study of religion in North America (a point already discussed by Carr 1961, 29–32).

With the social scientists, the new historicists also understand human acts and expressions to be embedded in any, and all, cultural manifestions. The distinction between the literary texts that so preoccupied the historicists and the nondiscursive practices and cultural materials observed by anthropological fieldworkers are thereby dissolved. In contrast to the political and diplomatic concerns that dominated the work of the old historicism, the new historicism is concerned more with social and cultural histories, than with the politics of everyday life.

The theoretical feature the new historicism shares with the old is its reliance upon the explanatory value of culture; for the cultural role of the historian in the case of the new historicism, for the cultural character of the historical event in the case of the old. Neither accounts, however, for culture itself, apparently ceding this task to the anthropologists who, alas, embrace this same strategy of contextual explanation (McCauley and Lawson 1996). As a consequence, the past for historicists, old and new, remains subject to the orientations of its interpreters, both of whom share a theory of history as politically shaped—the one emphasizing objective configurations of power, the other its subjective conformations. The central issue in historiography remains, in other words, one of theoretical orientation. In the words of a country song performed by Aaron Tippin: "You've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything."

Historical generalization and theory

The goal of even the most positivistic of historians is never certainty about the past but, rather, decisions about probability in the face of historical possibility (see Bloch 1953, 124). Consequently, the historian of religion must concede, for example, the possibility of von Däniken's scientistic reading of Genesis as a report about the human race being the consequence of "an act of deliberate 'breeding' by unknown beings from outer space" (von Däniken 1969, 61). Nevertheless, this same historian of religion must conclude, based upon available data, that this interpretation is most improbable. The basis for this conclusion, however, is not solely what we know of historical-critical details about the Hebrew text, more data, in other words, for the incessant and inexhaustible mills of possibility. Rather, this conclusion is also based on generalizations informed by such data. As E. H. Carr has concluded: "those who reject generalization and insist that history is concerned exclusively with the unique are, logically enough, those who deny that anything can be learned from history" (1961, 84).

If, however, historical generalizations about the data are not to remain mere speculation, they must be controlled by a clearly announced theoretical project subject to critical debate. I have previously referred to the significance of historiographical theory in connection with research on the religious formations of the Mediterranean world consequent upon the conquests of Alexander the Great (Martin 1983). A review of these observations in the present context might prove instructive.

In his "Introduction" to Franz Cumont's pioneering study of *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, Grant Showerman spoke of the "religious chaos in which the ancient world was struggling before the reign of Constantine" (Cumont 1956 [1911], vii-viii). Showerman's view reflected the prevailing generalization about this period which had been articulated by George Grote in the "Preface" to his monumental twelve-volume *History of Greece*, the first volume of which was published in 1846. Grote wrote that, following the reign of Alexander the Great:

> the political action of Greece becomes cramped and degraded—no longer interesting to the reader, or operative on the destinies of the future world...; as a whole, the period, between 300 BC and the absorption of Greece by the Romans, is of no interest in itself, and is only so far of value as it helps to understand the preceding centuries (1854 [1846], x).

His judgment concerning the historical insignificance of the time between the death of Alexander the Great and the final incorporation of Alexander's former empire into Rome by Augustus represented the conventional view of Western his-

tory since the Romans, who modelled their own history upon that of the Greeks and, as Cumont recognized, was supported subsequently by "conviction[s] of European leadership" (Cumont 1956, 8).

Coincidentally, biblical historians considered the period prior to the reign of Augustus—and the claimed birth of Jesus in this reign (Lk. 2:1)—as a period in decline, especially of its "pagan" religions, and, similar to Grote's general judgement about the period, of value only as a backdrop for their theologically informed construction of a new Christian era. The nineteenth-century acknowledgement of the period after Alexander was, in other words, but the grudging recognition of a "decadent" extension to Greek political history and a prelude to Roman, a period characterized by cultural and religious decline that was reversed by the advent of Christianity.

Grote's view takes on particular theoretical interest, however, since ten years earlier, in 1836, J. G. Droysen had published the first of his three-volume history on precisely that period so cavalierly dismissed by Grote. I know of no evidence that Grote, who had begun his own work as early as 1823, knew Droysen's work (Sandys 1908, 438), though it is tempting to see in Grote's statement his response to Droysen's new historical hypothesis, encapsulated in the opening line of his first volume: *"Der Name Alexander bezeichnet das Ende einer Weltepoche, das Anfang einer neuen"* (Droysen, 1980 [1836 – 43], I, 3).

Like other nineteenth-century historical generalizations, Droysen's new historical period was defined in political terms. These politically shaped generalizations about the character of history became associated further with the idealization of the hero, apparent in the literature of the age as in its historiography. This romantic "great man view of history," given formulation in Thomas Carlyle's view of history as "the biography of great men" and by Hegel's idealization of heroic "world-historical" individuals (Carlyle 1993 [1840], 26; Hegel 1956 [1861], 29 – 30), asserted the causal efficacy of exceptional individuals in initiating or altering the course of historical events. It is not surprising, therefore, that the period of time between two such exemplary political leaders as Alexander "the Great" and Octavian "Augustus," both romanticized in antiquity as in modernity, became recognized just in the nineteenth century as the initiators of successive historical periods. Thus, following the more influential second edition of Droysen's *Geschichte* in 1877 (Austin 1981, 7), historians increasingly recognized a Hellenistic period as extending from Alexander's Graeco-Macedonian empire until the last of the "Macedonian" monarchs, Cleopatra of Egypt, was vanquished by Augustus in 31 BC and the final Western remnant of Alexander's empire incorporated into that of Rome the following year. For Droysen, this period was "not a disjointed, chaotic monstrosity in the development of humankind" (Droysen 1980 [1836 – 43], 3,10), but rather a period of new and constructive be-

ginnings. In the words of one commentator, Droysen's *Geschichte des Hellenismus*, "fundamentally altered the way in which historians viewed late Greek history" (Southard 1995, 11).

Although Alexander's empire had fragmented with his death, giving support to earlier generalizations about decadence and chaos during this period, his Hellenistic ideal continued to be championed by his successors and an accelerated cultural interaction, and even interdependence, ensued among the citizens of Alexander's former empire. His program of Hellenization was resisted, however, by a number of indigenous peoples who sought to retain their traditional cultural heritage, whether passively by preserving their local language and customs, or militantly, as in the series of Egyptian anti-Hellenic revolts from as early as 245 BC or in the Jewish insurrections against the Hellenizing zeal of Seleucid rule in the second century BC. Religion especially, in whose name resistance to Hellenization was most often mounted, became currency in the Hellenized marketplace of competitive but cosmopolitanized cultural exchange. In other words, the religious history of this period had its own disposition, an integrity recognized by Cumont but which apparently still astonished Showerman.

While the non-political dimensions of culture are most certainly implicated with the political, political criteria cannot simply be assumed appropriate for the periodization of such as religious history. If a Hellenistic period of *political* history can be terminated with the consolidation of the Roman Empire under Augustus, in other words, a Hellenistic period of *religious* history is best concluded with the cultural dominance realized by Christians during the fourth century AD.

Historiographical theorizing is not only about the parameters of periodicity but includes also judgements about the essential characteristics of the periods defined. When Droysen nominated his newly defined period as "hellenistic," he also proposed its central feature. He appropriated this adjective, which does not appear in ancient Greek, from verbal and nominal forms signifying the acquisition of the Greek language and life-style by non-Greeks. Jason of Cyrene, for example, associated "an extreme of Hellenization" with an "increase in the adoption of foreign ways" (II Macc. 4.13). For Droysen, this adjective epitomized his Hegelian generalization about the *westöstliche Völkermischung* that occurred with Alexanders conquests (Droysen 1980 [1836 – 43], 1: "Vorwort zur Zweiten Auflage," on Droysen's Hegelianism, especially in Vol. 1 of the *Geschichte*, see Krüger in Droysen 1967, xviii). By the end of the century, historians

of religion had produced their technical term for the religious implications of this Hellenistic cultural mixture: "syncretism."[100]

Given the profusion of religious data from the Hellenistic period, including impressive new textual discoveries, such as the Nag Hammadi codicies, or the on-going archaeological discoveries of mithraea, for example, historians of religion continue to remain embarrassed by their difficulty in formulating this data into any coherent view. "Too often," in the observation of Marc Bloch, "historical research wanders aimlessly with no rational decision about where it is to be applied." Without theorical clarity, it vacilates between imposing "stereotyped themes...by routine" and "being marooned upon insignificant or poorly propounded questions" (Bloch 1953, 86).

Droysen, the only German historicist formally to address historiographical theory (Iggers 1983, 104, re: Droysen 1967), was able to propose thereby the significance of a neglected historical time, successfully challenging conventional historical periodization. Because of the new information, insights, and inferences generated by this new periodization, that represented by Grote was discarded.

These same data and deductions subsequently produced modifications to Droysen's own generalizations about the characteristic features of this period and, indeed, about the parameters of the period itself, the differentiation, for example, of religious from political history. In contrast to a politically determined period of Hellenistic history, a religious periodization includes Christian origins among those religious expressions that had populated the Mediterranean world since the end of the fourth century BC. Consequently a new set of questions about those beginnings are only now being seriously explored from a *history* of religions view (Smith 1990; Mack 1995).[101]

A modest proposal

Questions about knowledge of the past, about relativism, truth, and objectivity, have generally been neglected by historians. In a recent book, suggestively entitled *Telling the Truth About History*, the authors observe that such questions have been relegated to the esoteric domain of the philosophy of history and "dismis-

100 Paul Wendland understood "syncretism" and "hellenization" to be virtually synonymous processes (Wendland 1912, 129; see also Moffatt 1922, 155–7).

101 Despite Hermann Gunkel's proposal for a history of religions approach to the New Testament in 1903, New Testament research has retained a theological rather than theoretical agenda (see now, however, Mack 1995). For history of religions research in the larger area of Hellenistic religions, the work of Jonathan Z. Smith is exemplary (see, for example, Smith 1990).

sively categorized as 'theory'" (Appleby, Hunt and Jacob 1994, 9, 243). "Philosophy poses the right questions," E.L. Doctorow has the antagonist of his *novel* observe, "But it lacks the requisite diction for the answers. Only Science can find the diction for answers" (1995, 335).

Despite his observation that historiography is a work of imagination similar to that of the novelist, R.G. Collingwood (among others) has nevertheless insisted that historiography is a science in the sense that it is constrained by evidence. Reminescent of the historicist dictum, he continues that it seeks "to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened" (Collingwood 1956, 246). The world of past remains, in other words, like the external world queried by science, an invariant datum which, in the formation of Marc Bloch, "nothing in the future will change" (1953, 58). Robert McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson have recently emphasized that "progress in science," in which I would include historiography, turns:

> on the proliferation of *informed* speculations. Researchers' familiarity with the facts and their considered judgment are what inform speculations. Those speculations typically take the form of inferences to the best explanation...From these origins more sophisticated theories take shape. The continuing goal is not only to formulate new theories but to formulate *better* theories on the basis of the comparative insights that...[the data] provokes (1996, 282).

Although theoretically oriented research is being conducted in some areas of the history of religions, theoretical models for such historical research remain, for the most part, assumed and unaddressed. It might not be too presumptuous, consequently, to suggest the work of Michel Foucault as such a model.

In Foucault's view, what is most human in man is history, and Foucault understood himself as primarily a historian (Cousins and Hussain 1984, 3–6; Macey 1993,62; Martin 1995b, 62–67). Foucault emphasized the role of power in shaping both history and historiography. His association of knowledge with power not only proposes an analytic of the constructive dynamic of socio-historical forces but is a reintroduction, as well, of the Enlightenment principle of rationality as the corrective, through comprehension, of these power relations.[102] Foucault's overriding theoretical focus on power associates his work not only

102 The association of knowledge and power goes back to Francis Bacon (1598). On rationality as the antidote to power, see e.g., Foucault (1971). As this principle has been most recently expressed by Alan Sokal in an expose (1996b) of his own nonsensical satirical essay (1996a): "we [of the Left] have believed that rational thought and the fearless analysis of objective reality (both natural and social) are incisive tools for combating the mystifications promoted by the powerful" (Sokal 1996b, 64).

with the Enlightenment but with the political concerns of both nineteenth-century historicists and postmodernist historians. Unlike the postmodernists, however, for whom he had a deep distrust (Macey 1993, 463), Foucault gives careful attention to the data, to historical positivities. The perception that Foucault was deficient of, or cavalier with, historical data is a postmodernist fancy, mindlessly repeated by those interested in appropriating his theoretical authority and by uncomprehending critics alike. To what historiographical uses Foucault employs his data is a legitimate question that can—and should—be put to any historian. Like Droysen, however, Foucault has introduced a view of history that proposes theoretically founded questions.

Foucault's historical theory of power has allowed him to pose what, I would suggest, is the central question of any historiography: "Why are things just the way they are?" Historians of religion have been all too prepared to accept the religious insiders' answer to this question: "revelation," that is to say, some form of incomparable uniqueness which has been generalized, under some such category as *mana* ("power"!) or "the Sacred," as religion's *sui generis* foundation. Rather than relationships to some Power, Foucault would conceive of religion as power relationships (Chidester 1986, 1–9). Consequently, Foucault is confident that "religion," like that of "literature," "philosophy" or "history" is a "discursive grouping" constructed out of Western cultural history (Foucault 1972, 22), a position not unlike J. Z. Smith's oftcited observation that "religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study" (Smith 1982, xi). Nevertheless, knowledge of this history allows us a heuristically useful category, whether other cultures have a comparable word or category for "religion" or not.

Foucault's "genealogical/archaeological" historiography, challenges the theoretical privileging of origins conventionally assumed by historians, for example, the authority attributed their "founders" by various religious traditions and accepted as their own historical reference point by historians of religion. Two exceptions to this latter practice—interesting because of their doctrinal non-orthodoxy—are the suggestions of John Wansbrough (1977; 1978; Berg 1997) with respect to Islam and those of Burton Mack with respect to Christianity (1995).

I and others have written about the assumptions of "pure" origins inherent in the notion of syncretism. Most have attempted to salvage its usage as indications of extraordinary religious interminglings to be historically described and disjoined (e.g., Pye 1994, 222), a view that still assumes perforce some unsyncretized, normative form of religion. I have suggested, by contrast, that alleged syncretisms be understood as the ordinary historical nature of religious beginnings to be investigated as case studies for the historical diachronics of religions generally (Martin 1996).

The assumption of causal origins constitutes, in the words of one commentary "a history in which the past is read through the teleological grid of the present" (Cousins and Hussain 1984, 4). In test of this assumption, I have questioned the relevance of psychoanalytic dream theory for the understanding of dreams in antiquity, arguing that any dream meaning, including that of psychoanalytic dream theory, is culturally contingent (Martin 1994b); questioned generalizations about individualism, arguing that, whenever individualism emerged as a positive ideology in Western cultural history, it was later than the Hellenistic period and, thus, is an inappropriate category for understanding the religions of antiquity, including those Christian origins (Martin 1994c); and I have challenged regnant conventions about secrecy and the mystery religions, arguing that secrecy was primarily employed as a strategy for defining social boundaries rather than any occultation of techniques for mysteriosophical experience (Martin 1995a). In other words, as Cormac McCarthy has so aptly observed in *The Crossing*, his unsettling historical novel about life in the American south-west early in this century, *La tercera historia…es ésta. Él existe en la historia de las historias* ("The best arbiter of history is the history of histories") (McCarthy 1994, 411).

This is not the place for a full-blown discussion of the possible implications of Foucault's works for a history of religions.[103] Rather, it is to suggest that contemporary models of history *have* been proposed which build upon careful attention to data from a clearly theoretical perspective.

I suggest that historians of religion join with other historians not only in the pursuit of serious research but in the not inconsiderable task of historiographical reflection, theorizing about the parameters of our particular domain of *res gestae* and about the defining characteristics of this domain. In doing so, we might not only make a positive contribution to the wider discussions of the academy but even make a rational contribution to the study of *contemporary* religious doings, the discussion of which has rarely employed any recognition of their historical positivity.

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103 See the suggestions by Smith (1982, 25), Chidester (1986), and Asad (1993). Although classicists are not "historians of religion" in the professional sense, the important study by Price (1982) and those by Brown (especially 1988) must be mentioned here.

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12. Evolution, Cognition, and History

> The true difference [between history and poetry] is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is the more philosophical...for poetry tends to express the universal; history the particular.
>
> —Aristotle (*Poetics* 1415b)

Aristotle's view of history as the expression of unique events has characterized historiography from its establishment as an academic field in the mid-nineteenth century until the present. Nineteenth-century proposals for "scientific history," for example, were strictly concerned with an empirical description of facts—a position of particularism often unfairly associated with Leopold von Ranke's dictum that the historian should only show *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (Ranke 1824, vii).[104] Subsequently, historiographical methods were advanced that relied on the idiosyncratic *Gefühl* of the historian. Among others, R. G. Collingwood, for example, claimed that "the historian is doing something which the scientist... cannot do," namely, understanding the thought behind the particular events (Collingwood 1956, 214). This empathetic method of historiography, while still focused on particulars, assumed a humanistic view of understanding (*Verstehen*) that distanced the human sciences from the explanatory methods of the natural sciences as advanced for historiography by von Ranke. Similarly, Carl Hempel, in a classic 1942 essay, problematized Aristotle's distinction between a focus on the particular in historiography and a poetic (philosophical) concern with the general with his complaint that historians are "concerned with the *description* of particular events of the past rather than with the search for general laws which might govern [i.e., *explain*] these events" (Hempel 1965, 231). "In history as anywhere else in empirical science," he wrote:

> the explanation of a phenomenon consists in subsuming it under general empirical laws; and the criterion of its soundness is not whether it appeals to our imagination, whether it is presented in terms of suggestive analogies or is otherwise made to appear plausible—all this may occur in pseudo-explanations as well—but exclusively whether it rests on empirically well confirmed assumptions concerning initial conditions and general laws." (Hempel 1965, 240).

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104 Ranke actually exhorted historians "to rise...from the investigation and contemplation of the particular to a general view of events and to the recognition of their objectively existing relatedness" (Ranke 1971, 23). Thus, the sense of "*eigentlich*" in Ranke's "dictum" should not be understood as a mere description of "actual" facticity but as a methodological exhortation for an "accurate" *reconstruction* of the past (Iggers 1983, 63 – 64, 76 – 80).

Since the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), one of the candidates most often proposed as providing a general law of history has been that of evolution. This is not surprising since biological evolution and human history both deal with past events reconstructed on the basis of surviving bodies of incomplete evidence and with an interpretation and chronological synthesis of these events (Nitecki and Nitecki 1992, vii). Both presume "that human beings are a part of nature in both the biological and the cultural sense" and both adhere "to materialist explanations" (Allen 1992, 216). And Darwin's theory has proven to be remarkably robust in accounting for biological change even as alternative theories of social and historical change have proven to be just as remarkably strained.

Already in 1882, the Dublin anatomist Alexander Macalister sought to apply to historical change "the operation of those great laws which [he considered also to] work in other departments of the material and moral world" (Macalister 1882, 4), that is, the "laws" of Darwinian evolution. In his scientific work, Macalister had provided a Darwinian account of anatomical variations (e. g., Macalister 1894) and had sought evolutionary connections between human and primate physiology (e. g., Macalister 1871b, 1873; Livingstone 2007, 77). He had reviewed Darwin's *Descent of Man* the year it was published (Macalister 1871a) and, subsequently, his work had been cited by Darwin (e. g., Darwin 1872, 10, n.13; 1879, 31, n 30). Macalister's proposal for understanding the course of history in terms of Darwinian evolution anticipated basic assumptions for subsequent such programs:

> When, in the history of any set of phenomena, we find that at certain successive stages the sequences vary, and that these variations are directly and recognizably related to the external surrounding conditions, we assume that there is a direct connexion between these external conditions and the modified sequences, and we say that the resulting state of things is due to evolution. The fundamental postulates are a capacity of variation in the train of sequences, and external modifying influences, and the latter may be either the direct action of the environments on the phenomena, or may be due to a power from without, overruling and directly ordering the modifications. In this sense evolution may be defined as the principle in accordance with which phenomena are modified to keep them in harmony with their surrounding conditions (Macalister 1882, 10).

Macalister recognized that "no such [historical] process of moulding can take place" unless its theoretical object may be viewed as an "organism" that is "a central growing force of its own" (Macalister 1882. 36). His own case study for his proposal was the history of the Christian Church, the "vitality" of which he understood to be found in the "the sum" of its "component members" (Macalister 1882, 36). Macalister's presumption of social groups evolving through the

effects of natural selection has been reintroduced by contemporary proponents of social evolution (e. g., Wilson 2002).

Seventeen years later, the Cambridge classicist Jane Harrison, in her contribution to the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* (Seward 1909), also proposed a Darwinian approach to history, again with respect to religion. Unlike Macalister, however, who had exempted the human psyche (or soul) from "the operation of those great laws which work in other departments of the material and moral world" (Smith 1923, xxxv; Livingstone 2007, 78). Harrison, citing Darwin's own anticipations for the future of psychology, proposed a history of religion that would focus on "the necessary acquirement of each mental capacity [for specific religious practices and ideas] by gradation" (Darwin 2003, 458; Harrison 1909, 497). Her proposal for understanding religion as an ensemble of evolved behavioral features presciently articulated the recent agenda of contemporary evolutionary psychologists and cognitive scientists.

By the early twentieth century, in other words, both an (social) evolutionary and a (proto-) cognitive approach to the study of history had been proposed—both, interestingly, with respect to the history of religions. And both of these proposals focused on microevolutionary processes: the sum of the individual members of the Church, for Macalister; the evolved mental capacities of humans for specific religious ideas and practices, for Harrison. This initial focus on microevolutionary processes eluded many of Darwin's followers—especially among social scientists —and contributed to the rise of social Darwinism. These social Darwinists accepted uncontroverted descriptions of a continual historical relationship between more recent societies and their antecedents and they committed themselves as well to a lawful explanation for such historical and social change, which evolutionary theory seemed to provide. However, the growing body of ethnographic evidence increasingly contested their views of socio-cultural development as adaptive, i. e., as inevitably progressive, while the rediscovery of Mendel's laws of heredity challenged analogies of transmission to heredity by showing that natural selection was neither the mechanism whereby variations were produced, as they had assumed, nor their source (Tax and Krucoff 1968, 404 – 405).

In 1989, a group of biologists, historians, and philosophers gathered in Chicago to address the implications of contemporary, i. e., post-Mendelian or neo-Darwinian, evolutionary theory for historical method and their conclusions, edited by Matthew and Doris Nitecki, were published in 1992 as *History and Evolution*. The primary issue debated by participants in this symposium—and, as we shall see, continue to be discussed today—was the relationship, if any, of the artificial and intentional selection of historical variation from the non-intentional and non-teleological processes of biological variation (Ruse 1992, 174).

Perhaps the most significant contribution to this 1992 volume—because the position advanced continues at the forefront of contemporary discussion—is Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson's article "How Microevolutionary Processes Give Rise to History" (Boyd and Richerson 1992, 179–209). Boyd and Richerson correctly note that the "amount of data available from the past is usually very limited, and the number of possible reconstructions of the past is correspondingly large." Consequently, they conclude, "[s]ome sort of theory has to be applied to make some sense of the...isolated facts" (Boyd and Richerson 1992, 201).

What makes patterns of change over time "historical," they contend, is, first, that the "[t]rajectories are not stationary on the time scale of interest," i.e., they represent an occurrence of long-term change that does not repeat itself (Boyd and Richerson 1992, 185, 202) and, second, that "[s]imilar initial conditions give rise to qualitatively different trajectories" (Boyd and Richerson 1992, 186, 202). Building upon their earlier arguments in *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (1985), Boyd and Richerson identify three processes that affect historical variation: "random forces," which, they argue "are the cultural analogs of mutation and drift in genetic transmission;" "biased transmission" or "decision-making forces," which "result when individuals evaluate alternative behavioral variants and preferentially adopt some variants relative to others;" and "natural selection," which "may operate directly on cultural variation" (Boyd and Richerson 1992, 182). While historians readily acknowledge the first two of these processes, it is natural selection that is at the center of theoretical analogies to evolutionary views of culture and history and the most problematic because of questions concerning the mechanisms for the heritable variation that is theoretically requisite. There have, however, been no analogues identified for genes whereby culture might self-replicate—apart, of course, from Richard Dawkin's suggestion of memes, or cultural "units of imitation" that might be transmitted from "brain to brain" (Dawkins 1989, 192). Although Dawkins' proposal has attracted some interest within cultural studies, it has not been widely accepted by the scientific community as it is, of course, but yet another biological analogy for historical transmission. Boyd and Richerson seek to escape this problem, however, by reverting to a pre-Mendelian Darwinian orthodoxy. "Darwin formulated a clear statement of natural selection," they write,

> without a correct understanding of *genetic* inheritance because it is a force that will operate on *any* system of inheritance with a few key properties. There must be heritable variation, the variants must affect phenotype, and the phenotypic differences must affect individual's chances of transmitting the variants they carry.

"That variants are transmitted by imitation rather than sexual or asexual reproduction," they continue, "does not affect the basic argument, nor does the possibility that the source of variation is not random" (Boyd and Richerson 1992, 182; emphases theirs). Boyd and Richerson's view of historiography would seem, therefore, to meet the generalizing condition for scientific explanation advocated by Hempel. The question is whether Darwinian evolution provides an appropriate generalizing condition for a scientific explanation of history or simply represents the kind of suggestive analogy that Hempel judged to be a pseudo-explanation.

Like Hempel, Karl Popper had rejected evolutionary theory as an explanation for history, indeed, for anything, apart from "a host of biological and paleontological observations" (Popper 1957, 106). However one might argue against Popper's logical inference of a historical determinism in such lawful explanations (Popper 1957, vi-vii), and against his subsequent characterization of social processes in terms of a Darwinian evolutionary epistemology as a "metaphysical research programme" (Popper 1976, 167–189), Matthew Nitecki simply dismisses such criticisms (Nitecki 1992, 15). Rather, he asserts, somewhat salvifically, that since "[h]istory, like evolutionary biology, *must* explain human life, *must* help in understanding human life," "we *must* try to shape and control future events"—"[i]n spite of Popper" (Nitecki 199, 15, emphasis added; but see, in the same volume, the brief comments by Robert Richards, and by Michael Ruse, 156, 163–164)!

The journal *History and Theory* subsequently published a theme issue on "Evolutionary Ideas and History" (Shaw and Pomper 1999) which continued and extended the discussions of historical and cultural change as the products of evolutionary forces that had been initiated by the Niteckis a decade earlier though with little notice taken of contributions to this earlier volume. What stands out in this later debate, however, is the contribution by the historian Joseph Fracchia and the biologist Richard Lewontin criticizing evolutionary views of history as a "problematic conflation of historical and evolutionary processes" (Fracchia and Lewontin 1999, 60). Even if history were in some sense law-like, they ask, "does that make a historical process evolutionary" (Fracchia and Lewontin 1999, 57)?

The methodological issue raised by evolutionary views of history, according to Fracchia and Lewontin, is whether they are to be understood as isomorphic with or analogous to Darwinian theory. If isomorphic, the appropriateness of applying a theory developed to explain the data of one domain, organic speciation, to those of another, the behavioral and ideational productions of a single species, must be raised. If analogical, the conflation of historical and evolutionary processes is achieved, they argue, by substituting for features from various biological elements of Darwinian theory features from culture that are taken to be

analogous (Fracchia and Lewontin 1999, 68)—transmission with heredity, for example. They consider such substitutions to be "slights of conceptual hand" (Fracchia and Lewontin 1999, 68, 69) by which analogies of cultural evolution to natural selection are more isomorphic with Darwinian vocabulary than with Darwinian theory (Fracchia and Lewontin 1999, 68). Whatever one might conclude about attempts to apply the Darwinian theory of organic evolution to cultural and historical change, whether directly or by analogy, the fundamental question posed by Fracchia and Lewontin is whether any "useful work is done by substituting the metaphor of evolution for history" (Fracchia and Lewontin, 1999, 52, 78)? And, it might be asked further whether selectionist models other than the biological might be more appropriate for explaining historical change? —economic models of the marketplace, for example (e. g., the essays in Hogarth and Reder 1987; Young 1997).

Proposals for evolutionary views of history have primarily focused on generalized explanations for the production and transmission of culture—the "stuff" of history—but they have not specifically considered that impulse by which Aristotle had defined history and which continues to concern the work of most historians—an "interest in singular events" (Popper 1957, 144 – 145, n. 1). In the same issue of *History and Theory* in which Fracchia and Lewontin criticized evolutionary theories of culture, the anthropologist Donald Brown, perhaps best known for his earlier groundbreaking argument for human universals (Brown 1991), nevertheless concluded that an "attention to particulars" will be required if the influence of evolution for human affairs is not simply to become a "vacuous truism" (Brown 1999, 155). And in the same Darwinian commemorative volume to which Harrison had contributed her evolutionary proposal for a history of religions, the historian John Bury concluded that while general principles may embody the necessary conditions for any particular sequence, they do not provide sufficient conditions, whether in history or in biology (Bury 1909, 539).

The reconsideration of historical particulars which began to appear in the contributions to the special issue of *History and Theory* focused, however, on the expressions of evolved panhuman capacities of individual minds (as recognized by Harrison), which highlights the particulars of historical events if not their singularity. Whatever their position, most of the contributors to this volume now acknowledged the significance of evolutionary psychology, especially as articulated by John Tooby and Leda Cosmides in their contribution to *The Adapted Mind*, "The Psychological Foundations of Culture"—published the same year as the Nitecki's volume (Barkow *et al.* 1992)—and subsequently developed by cognitive scientist such Scott Atran (1990; 2002), Pascal Boyer (1994; 2001) and Lawrence Hirschfeld (e. g., 1994), among others.

Dan Sperber, for example, has formulated a hypothesis of cognitive attractors as an alternative to that of the selectionist model favored by evolutionists such as Boyd, Richerson and their collaborators (Sperber 1996, 98 – 118). For Boyd and Richerson, culture is largely transmitted by imitation and learning, a view supposing the brain to be a blank slate, which no behaviorist would deny but which the cognitive revolution has challenged. However transmitted, Boyd and Richerson argue that culture can impact genes in a gene-culture co-evolution. But, as Sperber observes, although "[h]uman culture has been around long enough for biological evolution to have been affected by it" and can help explain "the existence in humans of abilities that are specifically geared to cultural interaction, such as the language faculty"..."[g]ene-culture co-evolution," is just "too slow a process to explain cultural changes in historical time" (Sperber 1996, 114). Rather, Sperber identifies a probabilistic cognitive bias—evolved cognitive defaults—that stabilize the transmission of cultural information (Sperber 1996, 112).

In the view of Sperber and the cognitivists, these cognitive "adaptations to an ancestral environment... "tend to fix a lot of cultural content in and around [particular] cognitive domains" (Sperber 1996, 113; see Sperber and Hirschfeld 2004). Although Sperber and his colleagues accept that the conformity- and prestige-biased explanations for cultural transmission favored by the selectionists contribute to the macro-stability of culture, cognitive attractor biases function especially to stabilize the transformations of and modifications to information at the micro-level of transmission within populations and across generations (Claidière and Sperber 2007, 91). Sperber concludes that his model of cultural attraction is nevertheless Darwinian in that "it explains large-scale regularities" in culture and in history "as the cumulative effect of micro-processes" (Sperber 1996, 118). Such an "epidemiological" explanation for culture, based on an exploration of micro-processes, is not completely alien to historians. William McNeill, for example, has studied the effects of a series of micro-processes on world history—that of the spread of infectious diseases being perhaps the most well-known (McNeill 1976; see also 1982 and 1995, and Gaddis 2002, 25 – 26).

Régis Debray, the self-styled *médiologiste*[105] and caustic critic of Sperber (Debray 1997; 2000, 88 – 98; see also Tanney 1998), has differentiated between information that occurs and is communicated in a cultural present from that which endures and is transmitted over time (Debray 2000, 3). Whereas communication bears no necessary mandate for transmission, transmission over time not only

105 Debray coins the term *médiologie* to designate study dedicated to the material transmission of cultural meanings (Debray 2000, *viii*).

requires communication (Debray 2000, 7) but it gives relief and dimension to the fleeting things that are simply communicated (Debray 2000, 5). In contrast to the epidemiological model of communication proposed by Sperber, in which processes of communication are basically ones of transformation, however stabilized (Sperber 1996, 83; also Debray 2000, 27), processes of transmission, according to Debray, struggle to make inroads towards permanence, that is, towards history (Debray 2000, 4). Historical transmission unaided, Debray argues, is simply inadequate. Rather, historical permanence, he insists, requires an exteriorization of individual meaning and memory into material culture (Debray 2000, 10, 78, and *passim*). Anything significant enough to be encoded in neural networks, Debray argues, may also be considered significant enough to be inscribed and conserved in *material* culture as well (Debray 2000). Such inscribings—from the first flint tools to writing itself—can provide the historian with way stations for describing continuing mnemonic and reflexive traditions of transmission and exegesis. As Aviezer Tucker has recently emphasized, "[o]ur knowledge of history is limited by the information-preserving evidence that survived the obliterating ravages of time in the historical process" (Tucker 2004, 261). "The common scientific theoretical background that allows historians to reach uncoerced consensus concerns the transmission of information in time, not the evolution of society." Whatever one concludes about the relationship of history and evolution, for "historiography and archaeology" Tucker concludes, "the *evolution of society* and the *transmission of information* on past events are *independent of each other*" (Tucker 2004, 260).

Despite the discussions on the possible relationship of and potentials of evolutionary and cognitive theorizing for historiography, historians have been and continue to be reluctant to extend their explorations to the evolved panhuman capacities of and constraints upon human minds. In a recent article that surveys "what's happening in history now?," for example, the medieval historian Caroline Bynum notes that over the past three decades there have been a number of discussions concerning "the application of what is known generically as 'theory' to 'historical scholarship.'" She notes that, in broad terms, these discussions have turned from an earlier concern with social theory to cultural (linguistic, textual) theory (Bynum 2009, 73) but this "linguistic turn," she concludes, has produced "no new theory of theory that has swept the field—or even commanded much attention from professional historians" (Bynum 2009, 74). Bynum does identify two new approaches to historiography that have emerged over the past decade, both of which we might characterize as a "return to science," to refer to the title of the theme issue of *History and Theory* cited above (Shaw and Pomper 1999 (and referenced by (Bynum 2009, 77 n 19)—though Bynum prefers instead to characterize these new approaches as "a retreat from the textual" (Bynum 2009, 77).

The first of the new approaches to historiography that Bynum identifies is a "renewed interest in material culture and physical objects" (Bynum 2009, 77). This renewed interest is, of course, the consequences of scientific advances in archaeological methods. Bynum mentions, for example, dendrochronology, zooarchaeology, and analyses of mineralogical emissions. The second of the new approaches that she acknowledges is the subject of this volume, the explicitly scientifically informed "enthusiasm for what one might call deep structures, represented both by an upsurge of so-call 'big' or 'deep' history and a renewed recourse to sociobiological and cognitive explanations for human behavior" (Bynum 2009, 77). However, she argues, as do some of the critics of those who seek to understand historical by biological change (referenced above), that "in the hands of most professional historians, even cognitive science and parallels from the old field of ethology...tend to be used analogously" (Bynum 2009, 78). In this way, Bynum is able wistfully to reaffirm cultural studies as usual rather than exploring recent scientific advances in historiographical methods. "The study of 'the material,' she concludes, "is not...beyond the cultural turn" (Bynum 2009, 80). And "[e]ven 'deep history' at its best," she argues, "involves understanding that physical or physiological structures are always mediated through our ways of knowing them, and hence through culture" (Bynum 2009, 78).

Two recent exceptions to Bynum's nostalgic pronouncements are a study by the Canadian historian Gregory Hanlon of *Human Nature in Rural Tuscany* (2007) and that by the Harvard historian Daniel Lord Smail *On Deep History and the Brain* (2008; referenced by Bynum 2009, 77, n 20). Similar to Sperber's proposal for evolved cognitive attractors which stabilize and constrain the transmission of cultural materials, Hanlon organizes and interprets detailed archival evidence within the theoretical constraints of evolutionary psychology and cognitive science, "the larger context" of which, he argues, "sets the limits of what can and cannot occur or endure beyond the short term" (Hanlon 2007, 8). In his prolegomenon to "deep history," which embraces that of *H. sapiens* since their emergence, Smail also focuses on the evolved capacities and constraints of human brains. By example, he considers the panhuman proclivity for mind-altering substances (e.g., alcohol, drugs) and practices (e.g., religious rituals), their institutionalization, and their commodification over time. In this way, Smail suggests precise mechanisms whereby culture (or, more precisely, social institutions) might act upon evolved biological and cognitive proclivities to alter the human phenome (but not necessary the human genome).

Discussions about the relationship between social and cultural history and the more recent "scientific" history continue as do those among the "natural selectionists" and the "cognitive attractionists," as well a wide range of discussions among those seeking to understand the implications of Darwin's initial insights for an in-

terpretation—even an explanation for—historical change, or, at least, aspects of that history.

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13. Does Religion Really Evolve? (And What Is It Anyway?)

Proposals for employing a Darwinian account of religion as a product of natural selection are not new. Already in 1882, the Dublin anatomist Alexander Macalister (1882) gave a lecture on "evolution in church history" in which he explicated ways in which ritual and organizational "variation" might be explained as adaptations to environment (Macalister 1882, 35). Subsequently, proposals have been made for understanding the evolution of the "mental capacities" for religious ideas and practice (Harrison 1909, 497–498); for the evolution of religious groups themselves (Wilson 2002) and even for religion itself (Richerson and Boyd 2005)—all employing a Darwinian model. The methodological issue raised by these proposals is whether they are to be understood as isomorphic with or analogous to Darwinian theory. If isomorphic, the appropriateness of applying a theory developed to explain the data of one domain, organic speciation, to those of another, the behavioral and ideational productions of a single species, must be raised. If analogical, the question remains of whether any "useful work is done by substituting the metaphor of evolution for history" (Fracchia and Lewontin 1999, 52, 78)? And whether this application be understood as isomorphic with or analogous to Darwinian theory, what, precisely, are the data to be explained?

Does "religion" really evolve?

Those outside the area of religious studies seem to have little problem discussing the pros and cons of its evolution. To those within the field of religious studies, however, discussions about the evolution of religion seem curiously quaint since scholars in that academic field, over its one-hundred-plus years of existence, have yet to produce anything resembling a consensual definition of *religion* or even of *religions*—apart from their own, of course (à la Macalister, 1882). This is because, as some historians of religion now insist, "religion" is a Western academic (and political) category and not a "natural kind" with any independent existence that might be presumed to have evolved (Smith 1982, xi).

Do religious "groups" evolve?

Some scholars wish to argue more specifically that it is not religions themselves but religious groups that evolve. However, neither the internal coherence of any social formation nor the definition of its boundaries would seem to be sufficiently stable over time to conclude that they could function as adaptive units which might evolve in ways that are either isomorphic with or analogous to biological species. Joseph Bulbulia, nevertheless, contends that religious groups are adaptive because they reduce "the cognitive load of social living" through "co-operative norm-reinforcement" (Bulbulia 2006, 25). However, alternative social formations perform the same function. That is to say, "co-operative norm-reinforcement" is instantiated not only by religious coalitions but, for example, by adherence to the rules in various sports or by the carefully observed conventions of swingers' clubs. But no one has argued that any of these groups represent an evolutionary adaptation—especially the latter. That "religions" (if I too may beg the categorical question) supports group solidarity—at least among their own members—is an observation that is, in other words, true but trivial since any number of other social formations may, and do, contribute also to social solidarity. Such considerations invariably slide, in other words, into an affirmation of the assumed category on the basis of correlate functions.

Some would extend evolutionary explanations even to the development of large-scale cooperation among non-kin (Richerson and Boyd 2005, 203–236). Such cooperation can, however, be explained more parsimoniously by political history, in which, for example, one small-scale society may find it expedient to cooperate with another in competition with a third for, for example, resources insufficient to support all parties. Typically, these negotiations were concluded by strategies, such as an intermarriage, that allowed all members of the new alliance to be represented as trusted kin. Such sociopolitical intrigues were, of course, characteristic of much European feudal history.

A remarkable theoretical account of an alliance between groups of non-kin is preserved in Hebrew epic, whatever one concludes about its facticity. According to this epic, a federation was negotiated by a number of Middle Eastern Bedouin tribes to compete with neighboring tribes for the "milk and honey," i.e., the scarce resources, of their rather barren environment (Ex. 3, 13, 23, 33–34). The basis often given for the "solidarity" of this alliance is religious, i.e., their collective faith in a single deity. Rather, the success of this epic endeavor was made possible by their construction of a descent myth identifying these disparate groups as being "in fact" descendents of a common ancestor (Gen. 12–25). It was this *ex post facto* "discovery" of common kinship that allowed the gods of the previously autonomous tribes to be re-represented as aspects of a single

deity in the first place rather than any acceptance of a single deity providing a basis for the federation. Thus, even if we accept the argument that groups, large or small, evolve by adaptation—a plausible position which should not simply be dismissed (Wilson 2002, 12–25)—these arguments tells us nothing about "religion" itself unless the claimed adaptations can be shown to be dependent upon at least one of its distinctive aspects.

Do aspects of "religion" evolve?

Recognizing that there is no such "thing" as religion, many advocates of evolutionary views of religion now consider religion a multifaceted reality to be "fractionated" or dissected into its constitutive behaviors, ideas, or traits, each of which has (or may have) its own evolutionary (or adaptive) history (à la Harrison 1909) (Bering 2005, 412; Bulbulia 2005, 36). But you can't carve up a turkey without having the bird and since religion is not a natural thing to dissect, evolutionary discussions of its aspects seem rather quickly to digress into those of a presumed category.

One of the traits most commonly associated with religion is, for example, morality. The relationship of moral behavior to religion is, however, a non-necessary historical contingency, as the non-theistic legitimization of ethics in ancient Greece and Rome or in Confucian China exemplify. Rather, views of a symbiosis between morality and religion are largely a legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its modern colonial hegemony. Such ethnocentric biases in the study of religion—well documented by scholars of comparative religions—present a potential problem for evolutionary psychologists and cognitive scientists in stipulating the theoretical object for their evolutionary considerations or in their experimental designs (Brown 1999, 154).

Similarly some experimental psychologists have shown that many of the traits typically associated with religion—teleological reasoning, for example, or inferences about an afterlife—are natural expressions of ordinary cognitive capacities that can be elicited experimentally under laboratory conditions. This *a*religious incidence of such traits characterizes, of course, all such evidence adduced experimentally and would seem to present a confound for those who argue an adaptive story for aspects of "religion." In other words, those human traits often taken to be religious are, in fact, ordinary expressions of human cognitive capacities. Unless a necessary or dedicated relationship can be established between such capacities and the target category, nothing has been discovered about the evolution of—or anything else about—"religion."

So what then is religion?

Rather than "top-down" approaches to the question of the evolution of religion that assume the category and that, consequently, privilege its various contents, what would seem to be required is a theoretical stipulation of the necessary characteristic(s) of what is *not* to be considered religious and a "bottom-up" study of whether or not such a differentiating characteristic(s) is indeed an evolved human trait. This is not to propose any kind of essentializing definition for religion but simply an attempt to discern what makes "religion" a distinctive (and predicative) category at all—no matter how "fuzzy" its boundaries. Daniel Dennett counseled that the starting point for such a consideration might initially be based on "common sense and tradition" (Dennett 2006, 8)—though I might suggest that the insights from the comparative study of religion might better inform such initial inquiries. Whatever else might differentiate the religious from the non-religious, *claims to the authority of superhuman agency that recruit and legitimate otherwise ordinary human behaviors and ideas and that motivate their practice and perseverance* would seem to characterize all religions. The question of the "evolution of religion" would seem, therefore, to turn, at the outset, on that of the adaptive efficacy of representations of superhuman agents and on the acceptance of at least some of these representations as authoritative.

As a number of cognitive scientists have argued, the human brain easily and readily produces representations of superhuman, that is, potentially powerful, non-human agents (Boyer 2001)—from fairies, trolls, and leprechauns to the imaginary friends of young children and even to those of adults, as poignantly portrayed by Jimmy Stewart's 6 foot, 3½ inch invisible rabbit companion in the 1950 film *Harvey*. This ready representation of agency is likely an adaptive response "from the wild" in which survival would depend upon quick identification, on the basis of ambiguous perceptual input, of possible agents in the environment as either friend or foe, predator or protein. Such a response can still be noted, for example, in the common reactive representations of a stick, semi-concealed in the high grass, as a potentially dangerous serpent, even though poisonous snakes may well be known to be absent from the present environment. Selection for such a survivalistic response has resulted in a cognitive bias towards identifying agency even where there is none—as in the suggestive formations of clouds, on the surface features of the moon, or in the lonely shadows of the night.

Although representations of non-human agents by *H. sapiens* seem to be "natural," not all such "naturally" represented agents become re-represented as superhuman beings that might authorize or motivate shared behaviors and ideas. It would seem, consequently, as though "religion" might best be under-

stood as exploitations of such naturally produced representations of agency and their postulation as authoritative in the service of sociopolitical interests. Because of the universal human bias towards the representation of agency, such "religious" authority, once postulated, could readily be accepted, transmitted and developed—along with, of course, the social structures and values thereby legitimated.

While it is undeniable that human beings have evolved capacities for producing culture, including those behaviors and representations typically associated by scholars with religion, it does not follow that religions are themselves adaptive simply because they exist nor that change in religious traditions over time are evolutionary. Rather, most cognitive scientists have concluded that religion is "not an evolutionary adaptation per se, but a recurring cultural by-product of the complex evolutionary landscape that set cognitive, emotional, and material conditions for ordinary human interactions" (Atran and Norenzayan 2004, 713). The persistence into the modern world of the counterintuitive—even maladaptive—by-products that are characteristic of religious behaviors and ideas would seem to provide yet another confound for those who would argue that religion (or culture) itself is an ongoing adaptive process.

Conclusion

I should like to emphasize that views of religions as evolutionary epiphenomena in no way minimize the impact they have had—and continue to have—for human societies. In fact, an understanding of religion as a strategic exploitation of evolved human capacities and behaviors in service of historically contingent social interests may offer a better explanation for its benevolent as well as its malevolent uses throughout human history than do such arguments for religions as manifestations of some *sui generis* spiritual trait of *Homo religiosus* (Eliade 1969, 9). It might be asked, consequently, what evolutionary theory might contribute to the work of the historian *qua* historian. As Richerson and Boyd rightly concluded, "well-studied models and well-tested empirical generalizations," such as those supplied by evolutionary theory, can be of value for the work of historians, not only because of "the complexity of the problems" (Richerson and Boyd 2005, 48) to be solved but also—I might add—because of the fragmented, incomplete, and pre-interpreted evidence with which the historian is confronted. The problem of historians, in other words, is less one of complexity than of deficiency, that is, of how best to connect the insufficient dots of surviving historical materials in order to provide inferential representations of the past to the best evidence.

The historian John Bury has argued that while general principles may embody the necessary conditions for any particular sequence, they do not provide sufficient conditions, either in biology or in history (Bury 1909, 539). And the anthropologist Donald Brown has cautioned that an "attention to particulars" is required if the influence of evolution for human affairs is not simply to become a "vacuous truism" (Brown 1999, 155). What is required, then, are well-tested theories that might inform and constrain while not imposing upon historiographical method. Even as the historical sciences employ constraining theories for dealing with the complexities and incomplete records of their data—astrophysics in cosmology, for example, or plate tectonics in geology (Edelman 2006, 80–88)—evolutionary theory can constrain the proximate as well as general explanations of historians. But the courses of human history can—and do—fluctuate widely within these constraints. The multiple variables governing the complexity of historical developments cannot, in other words, be explained in terms of biological generalization nor should any one theory—no matter how powerful for its target domain—be expected to explain, or even provide an analogy for, everything. Attempts to explain the histories of religion in terms of Darwinian evolutionary theory, whether isomorphically or by analogy, not only create semantic and theoretical ambiguities but they prove finally to be inadequate.

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14. Religion and Cognition

Whereas the twentieth century has been characterized in terms of biological achievement, culminating with the mapping of the human genome, the twenty-first century is forecast as that of the brain. The understanding of this most complex of human organs is a daunting interdisciplinary project that includes, among others, evolutionary biologists and neuroscientists, researchers into cybernetics and artificial intelligence, philosophers and psychologists, social and cultural anthropologists, linguists and historians. Researchers from across this broad range of disciplines have already initiated major investigations into how our evolved genetic endowment expresses itself in the physiology of the brain and its various functional systems, the relationships and interactions of these systems, and the ways in which input from our environment is processed by these systems. Many of these researchers foresee that naturalistic explanations for the ways by which neurological structures and systems (brain) enable but also constrain our mental functions (mind) will be one of the outcomes of this research over the coming century. This prognosis of a material explanation for human cognition has been termed the identity of "brain" and "mind." In the meantime, cognitive scientists are contributing to this long-term task by focusing on the general properties, functions and organization of human cognition, including those associated with "religion."

What is Cognitive Science?

Cognitive scientists seek to explain the kinds of perceptual and conceptual representations that the mental processing of sensory input allows, the memory, transmission and transformations of these mental representations, the relationships among them, and the ways in which some of these mental representations become public. Everything that we perceive and conceive is, of course, the outcome of processing by the human mind. Much mental processing occurs, however, below the threshold of consciousness and, consequently, has only recently become recognized as an area of investigation. For example, human beings perceive their environment as a rich tapestry of color and represent it as such—to ourselves and to others, in decorative and artistic expressions, etc. What we experience as color is, however, not a property of objects in our environment but is a mental representation of our optic discernment of a certain spectrum of light waves as they are differentially reflected from these objects. This mental capacity to code our environment for color is an adaptive and evolved function of the human brain to help describe and to discriminate among objects in the environ-

ment, for example, those fauna and flora that are good to eat, an ability upon which survival depends. The point is that the chromatic representation of our environment is the effect of a significant but non-conscious processing of sensory input by brains. And there is any number of additional non-conscious biocognitive processes upon which we depend every day and throughout our lives, for example, those that regulate physiological functions such as the regular patterning of heartbeat and breathing, mental functions such as those that orient us in space and time, or social proficiencies such as instantaneous face recognition or the capacity for empathetic response.

In addition to such non-conscious mental functionings, humans also have a conscious ability to recognize and represent objects or events from our environment, or to recall certain objects or events from our past (from explicitly learned information or from experienced events). And we have the ability to communicate such representations among ourselves and to transmit them over time. We even have the ability to represent objects and events that have no natural existence. Common examples of such fabricated and fabulous representations include monsters, unicorns, imaginary friends, the dramatis personae of novels and myths, UFOs and their alien personnel, etc. From the adaptive perspective of natural selection, this ability to imagine allows us to anticipate and plan for possibilities with which we might be confronted in a not yet existent future —an ability already detectable in our primate forebears (Gazzaniga 2008, 540).

Finally, we have the ability to "represent our representations" both to ourselves (constituting, thereby, a component of our self-consciousness) as well as to others (establishing, thereby, a basis for communication and sociality). This "metarepresentational" ability allows us critically to reflect upon our representations, to categorize and to compare them with others, to judge them, and to discriminate, thereby, between "fact" and "fiction." It is this discriminatory capacity that allows for an adaptive relationship to the realities of our environment while establishing a basis for the production and appreciation of the creative arts. When this metarepresentational ability is employed, it is, nevertheless, often uncritically biased by learned values or by ideological commitments rather than based upon intersubjective and lawful criteria, as is the ideal, for example, in scientific inquiry. To the extent that the representational processes of human cognition can be accurately explained and their effects mapped, we have a scientific basis for explaining the production of all human mental representations, whether reflexive or reflective, factual or fictive, past and present.

History of Cognitive Science

Most pre-scientific views of mental activity have considered the human brain to be a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, upon which environmental/cultural input was writ, the output of which might be manipulated (by learning, by the exercise of reason, or by the strength of willpower). Simply put, understandings of workings of the mind were dominated by anecdotal evidence, a legacy of the philosophy of mind tradition that had long privileged first-person accounts of mental activity. This introspective tradition reached a psychological apogee in the psychoanalytic movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its philosophical zenith with twentieth-century phenomenology. With the increasing availability of more advanced medical care during the twentieth century, third-person accounts of mental capacities began to provide alternative, more objective views of mental functions. These studies, initially based upon observations of subjects who suffered brain lesions, either from injury or disease, together with subsequent advances in experimental psychology, showed that first-person accounts were insufficient to explain the increasingly sophisticated insights into the nature of mental processes and were, in many cases, simply illusory.

First-person accounts as the basis for understanding mental activity were further challenged by the rise of behavioral psychology, which, despite its continuing assumptions about the brain as a *tabula rasa*, nevertheless insisted upon systematically observable evidence for human behavior. Scientific controls on the stimulus-response methodology upon which behaviorism depended proved to be, however, imperfect. Even simple sensory stimuli are subject to a wide variety of responses that are, consequently, not reproducible. And as long as stimuli are capable of arousing a range of human response, they are simply not experimentally neutral.

The most significant challenge to the "mind-blind" premise of most traditional approaches to human mental activity was findings about the contributions of and constraints upon mental processing for the kinds of mental representations we are able to make. For example, by the mid-twentieth century linguists had concluded that young children exhibit a linguistic competency that is underdetermined by environmental input. For example, children from about the age of three begin to exhibit a consistent use of syntactic rules in their verbal constructions in the absence of any linguistically correct models in their environment from which they might learn these rules—the colloquial speech characteristic of most informal situations, such as the home, for example—and, of course, long before they receive any formal instruction about these rules. This conclusion about the constructive dynamic of human cognition is perhaps the single most well-known development contributing to what came to be termed the "cog-

nitive revolution." In turn, this conclusion gave focus to findings that were emerging from other fields during this period. Advances in computer technology suggested that the human brain is a kind of non-conscious computational system for information processing. Developments in information theory, which explored how information is encoded and transmitted, offered analogies for the mental processing of sensory input. And a resurgence in memory research began to describe discrete systems of human memory and the workings and limitations of these different systems with greater precision than had previously been the case. Finally, the development of non-invasive technologies for directly imaging brain activity—positron emission tomography, magnetic resonance imagery and functional magnetic resonance imagery, magnetoencephalography and, most recently (though minimally invasive), therapeutic deep-brain stimulation—has contributed to an explosion in the understanding of brain functions during the final decades of the twentieth century.

Why a Cognitive Science of Religion?

When an academic, in contrast to a theological, study of religion was first proposed in the late nineteenth century, it was envisioned as one of the new human sciences that would discover and describe universal laws of human behavior and change. While some social scientific studies of religion did embrace scientific paradigms such as Darwinian evolution (although generally misappropriated in terms of the social Darwinism of the time), scholars of religion steadfastly resisted as reductionistic any scientific approach to their work, preferring instead to retain their largely theological (confessional) agendas.

A general disenchantment with optimistic views of scientific and technological advances, and with concomitant views of social and cultural progress, followed upon the ravages of the First World War. This disillusionment, together with recognition of the fallacy of social Darwinism, reinforced the anti-scientism of religious scholars. Ironically, it was again the effects of political history that gave rise to a new focus among the human sciences. As a consequence of the Cold War, many scholars turned their attention to "area studies," especially to those areas considered of strategic concern to national securities, and to the unique histories of these areas, to the specificities of their cultures and to their subjectivities, including their religions.

But while human behaviors and representations are manifest in historically and regionally specific ways, they nevertheless seemed to some to express certain human universals. Mid-century phenomenologists of religion attempted to catalogue these human universals arguing that they were historically varied ex-

pressions of a *sui generis* (non-reducible) "sacrality." However, evolutionary biologists, cognitivists and anthropologists began to argue that such patterned universals were shaped, rather, by the ordinary capacities of and constraints upon human brain functions, which, like the panhuman functioning(s) of any of our organs or systems, are the naturally selected consequences of our evolutionary history (Tooby and Cosmides 1992; Mithen 1996; Atran 2002). Does this mean, then, that religion is an evolved adaptation of *H. sapiens* (See Bulbulia *et al.* 2008)?

Whereas cognitivists agree that many specifically human capacities, such as linguistic competence and sociality, are the adaptive products of our evolutionary history, most consider religion to be, like many other cultural activities, such as the ability to operate automobiles, an evolutionary by-product; that is, while "religion" is not itself evolved, it is a social construction upon cognitive proclivities that are. "Religion" is, in other words, not a natural kind, nor even a stable historical formation, upon which natural selection might act (See, however, D. S. Wilson 2002). This conclusion does not diminish the historical and social significance of religion. It does mean, however, that those cultural productions like "religion" that are evolutionary by-products of our mental functions are subject to different levels of explanation than the biological. And it means that representations of religion are still constrained by the mental "landscape" of evolved possibilities and are subject, therefore, to "naturalistic" explanations (Atran 2002) It is this possibility of naturalistic explanations that lie at the core of the cognitive science of religion.

The Cognitive Science of Religion

Although a cognitive science of religion was first suggested in 1980 (Guthrie), only a few systematically formulated cognitive *theories* of religion have been proposed. These theories are focused on areas of religious rituals, religious claims and religious transmission. While there are, of course, significant differences among and within these three areas of theoretical attention, together they lay the foundation for a comprehensive study of religion from the cognitive perspective.

Religious Actions

In 1990, the scholar of comparative religion, E. Thomas Lawson, and his colleague, the philosopher Robert N. McCauley, proposed a cognitive theory of reli-

gious ritual (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002). Whatever else religious rituals might be, they argued, they are human actions. Consequently, religious rituals can be understood in terms of the ways by which humans represent any action. This "human action representation system" is a set of formal relations that includes an "actor" or "agent," an "act" and "a recipient of the action" or "the patient." This formal representational structure, familiar also from syntactic expressions of action relations (i. e., subject, verb, object), generates the possibility for two categories of actions—those in which the agent acts upon the patient and those in which the agent is acted upon by the patient.

What qualifies either of these ordinary types of action as religious are claims about the presence of superhuman agents or of their authorized surrogates (a priest, for example) in the formal action structure. What qualifies agents as superhuman (whether understood in negative or in positive terms, e. g. as a god or as a demon) is an attribution to them of an ability to accomplish a result that is considered to be unobtainable by ordinary means. What qualifies either of these types of religious actions as ritual is that something significant is understood to have transpired in the act, again whether the result is viewed as positive (e. g. a blessing) or negative (e. g. a curse). Thus, for example, when a Roman Catholic priest, an authorized surrogate of Jesus (Son of God) through apostolic succession, baptizes an infant, the status of that infant is considered to be changed and he/she is henceforth recognized as a member of the Christian communion.

Lawson and McCauley further contend that the role assigned to superhuman agents predicts certain features of all religious rituals. When a superhuman agent, or its surrogate, is represented as the actor in the ritual—what Lawson and McCauley term "special agent rituals"—then that act, as an action by a superhuman agent, is understood to be altogether effectual and, as such, requires little or no repetition. Its uniqueness and significance is, however, typically invested with a sensory pageantry and emotional salience that enhances long-term memorability, as is typically the case, for example, with weddings. If, on the other hand, a superhuman agent is not represented in the ritual as the actor but as the *recipient* of an action—what Lawson and McCauley term "special patient rituals"—then the effects of that ritual, since it is performed by human agents, will be less effectual than those performed by a superhuman agents and, consequently, must be repeated. Periodic sacrifices or weekly offerings are examples of such rituals. And in contrast to the heightened sensory pageantry of special agent rituals, Lawson and McCauley predict that the regular performance and consequent routinization characteristic of special patient rituals will result in a diminution of their emotional salience and, consequently, of their memorability. The burden of memorability falls then to repetition, a process familiar from the rote memorization of, for example, the multiplication table

Lawson and McCauley readily acknowledge the limits of their theory. It addresses only religious rituals while (deliberately) avoiding wider issues in the study of religion, and it offers a view of religious ritual which may exclude other forms of religious action that do not conform to their model, such as prayer. Their very careful formulations, however, are the strength of the theory. Whereas religious scholars have heretofore understood ritual as an inclusive designation for virtually any set of patterned, repetitive behavior, the Lawson and McCauley theory differentiates religious from otherwise ordinary kinds of human behavior, while disclosing a common cognitive basis for both. Further, their theory differentiates among kinds of religious rituals that are often conflated, e. g. special agent rites of the Roman Catholic Mass (in which the same bread and wine may be transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus but once), and special patent rites of that Mass (in which the same patients repeatedly participate in Jesus' sacrifice over their lifetime). Such theories of ritual bring to the study of religion an analytical precision previously absent from religious studies (See e. g., Sørensen 2007).

Religious Ideas

If ordinary human actions are predicated as "religious" by claims to superhuman agents, then the basis for such claims must themselves be accounted for. The anthropologist Pascal Boyer has argued that representations of superhuman agency, documented from virtually every human society, are readily and easily produced by our ordinary cognitive equipment and are, consequently, as "natural" as are the actions they predicate (Boyer 2001). For example, "agents" as self-motivating, intentional objects in the world are readily distinguished from inanimate objects already by infants. Further, a surprisingly large number—perhaps a majority—of all young children claim to have imaginary friends. Such individuals, like those who are generally able to recognize but still enjoy fantasy (as fantasy), as adults tend to be particularly capable in their social understandings and abilities (Taylor 1999)—an attribute often associated with religion (e. g., Durkheim 1915).

This innate—or at least developmentally early—ability to detect and/or imagine agency is generalized as a tendency to represent all objects in our environment anthropomorphically, i. e., in terms of human features and attributes, and, likewise, all occurrences in our environments as intentional (Guthrie 1993). Anthropomorphic representation is such an exquisitely tuned feature of our cognitive processing that we tend to conclude that there is agency all around us (which of course there is) but even when no agent may actually be present

(e. g. faces in the clouds, bumps in the night, etc.). There is, of course, a survival advantage for any organism to be able to react reflexively to ambiguous information from its environment, such as a fleeting perception of movement, since this information may indicate the presence of a predator or foe. Even if it turns out, upon reflection, that the inferred presence was that of a friend or even incorrect—a blowing in the wind, as it were—"it is better to be safe," the old adage holds, "than sorry."

There is, in other words, little cognitive difference between imputing agency to unambiguous data and to ambiguous data, such as movement, intention, certain shapes, etc., especially when those data are deemed to be potentially relevant for our lives, as a possible indication of the presence of danger, for example. And if otherwise ambiguous events are judged potentially significant for our lives, again whether those effects are positive or negative, it is also "natural" to conclude that they may have been intentionally instigated. The human brain, of course, seeks explanations for such intuitive responses to environmental cues and they typically become rather quickly judged as fact or fiction. For others, such intuitive responses provide the occasions for metarepresentation, reflection and intellectual "rationalization."

The category of agency belongs to what cognitivists refer to as our "intuitive ontology," that is to say, to our ordinary expectations about the world. Thus, when any information is represented in terms of or as the effects of agency—whether actual or presumed, whether superhuman or not—a great deal of information is inferred from these expectations apart from any specifically learned knowledge. Such ordinary agency expectations include, for example, intentionality, self-movement, some form of metabolism, response to external stimuli, etc. In the absence of complete information, such ontological categories as "agency" are sometimes "violated." A common example is ghosts which are generally represented in terms of ordinary agency—they act and react in terms of ordinary sensory stimuli such as light, sound, smell, touch, they exist in time and hold memories of the past, they communicate and can be communicated with, etc. However, they are also represented as possessing a few characteristics that violate our ordinary expectations about agency, such as being capable of invisibility or of passing through physical barriers. Whereas such claims about ghosts violate ordinary expectations about agents, they are not so excessive as to be judged bizarre, like the Godzilla of Japanese film (even though they might still be enjoyed as popular diversion), or simply dismissed, at least by most (as are, for example, claims to the existence of aliens who abduct earthlings for titillating sexual experimentation). Rather the more minimalist violations, exemplified by ghosts, prove to be attention-grabbing and, consequently, highly memorable and readily transmissible while being, at the same time, ordinary enough to

be readily understood and, thereby, easily accepted (Boyer 2001). Most of the Christian Bible, for example, contains a collection of rather mundane stories—genealogies, family intrigues, accounts of kings and battles, insightful but unexceptional teachings, etc.—rendered attractive and memorable, however, by their association with claims to miraculous "acts of God" (or of His Son). It is these extraordinary acts that reportedly attracted the attention of the first Christians (e. g., The Gospel according to John 2:11, 6:12; Acts of the Apostles 2:22, the Epistles to the Romans 15:18 – 19 and to the Hebrews 2:3 – 4) and that retain the attention of modern Christians, many of whom admit never having read most of the "ordinary" portions of the Bible at all.

In addition to agency, cognitivists also refer to intuitive categories of "substances" or "physical objects," both natural and man-made, of "animals" and "plants" (Boyer 2001; Atran 2002). By investing any of these ordinary categories with some qualities that defy expectations, attention is drawn to the information embedded in or associated with them and that information tends, thereby, to be considered more valuable than others in the marketplace of possible human ideas and, consequently, selected and transmitted.

Religious Persistence

The original effects to which superhuman agency have been attributed often prove to be historically inaccessible or, if known, of little significance—that is to say, any number of ambiguous possibilities can evoke conclusions about and representations of superhuman intentionality. Is the hearing of voices, for example, to be interpreted as a divine call or as an auditory illusion? Are feelings of exaltation an indication of spirituality or of having a particularly good day? Whereas naturalistic explanations for such experiences garner little attention, their interpretations as "religious" prove to be attention grabbing and, once introduced, are readily transmitted in predictable ways. Cognitivists are interested in these modes of transmission.

The cognitive anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse has identified two divergent modes of religious transmission that he terms "imagistic" and "doctrinal" (Whitehouse 2004). The "imagistic mode of religiosity" does not refer, in Whitehouse's description, to religious traditions that trade in images—a trait of virtually all religions. Rather, "imagistic" is Whitehouse's designation for a mode of religiosity whereby religious knowledge is transmitted through infrequently performed rituals that—like Lawson's and McCauley's special agent rituals—are rendered especially memorable through intense sensory pageantry and heightened emotionality. The dramatic, often traumatic, character of these rituals typically

occasions a spontaneous exegesis of that experience by its participants as well as an enduring cohesion among them that is occasioned by the shared rigors of the ritual regimen and that result in closely-bound, face-to-face communities.

In contrast to the spontaneous exegetical reflections evoked by the emotionally salient rituals of the imagistic modality, religious knowledge in the doctrinal mode is formulated as a coherent set of shared beliefs or doctrines maintained by a strong, hierarchically organized leadership. Such coherently formulated sets of orthodox teachings allow for their ready transmission by authorized teachers and missionaries and for the relatively faithful reception and retention of such routinized catechetical instruction by followers. This widespread distribution of and adherence to a shared corpus of religious knowledge is characteristic of large, imagined communities in which individual affinities are mostly anonymous—large Protestant denominations, for example. While this doctrinal modality may be found in non-literate contexts, it is more often characteristic of literate societies or of those influenced by them.

The two modes of religious transmission proposed by Whitehouse rely on and are constrained by different systems of memory that are invoked by the different forms of ritual practice. The catechetical instruction in and the repetitive reinforcement of beliefs that are characteristic of the doctrinal mode of religiosity—and that are reminiscent of the encoding of memory associated with the repetitive character of special patient rituals—become encoded in the explicit memory system as generalized schemas of knowledge. The personalized experiences and exegeses characteristic of the imagistic mode are, on the other hand, encoded in the episodic or autobiographical memory system, the contents of which are only recalled when presented with stimuli associated with an individual's own participation in a particular event. This remembered material is organized (and transmitted) in terms of those personal associations and not in terms of any shared large-scale belief system.

A particularly salient type of episodic memory, sometimes referred to as "flash-bulb" memory, often results from participation in an especially traumatic or consequential event. This effect is exemplified by the abrupt and overwhelming emotional experiences that are a feature of many initiation rites both ancient and modern, e. g., initiations into a number of tribal societies, the Hellenistic mystery cults, criminal organizations or revolutionary cells, contemporary pseudo-religious fraternal groups or "fundamentalist" religious factions. Such events tend to create especially strong memories that, while incomplete, nevertheless accurately retain many details.

The cognitive anthropologist Dan Sperber has emphasized that the transmission of religious knowledge—like that of any knowledge—is from mind to mind. Such transmission inevitably involves transformations by which "remembered"

traditions are, at the same time, the consequence of constructive cognitive processes (Sperber 1996). This transformative inevitability is illustrated, at a non-profound level, by the children's game known variously as "Chinese Whispers" or "Telephone" in which a message that is transmitted from one person to another around the room becomes transformed, sometimes radically, by the time it reaches the final participant. On the other hand, messages which resonate with innate cognitive proclivities are attracted to those mental structures and result in a certain stabilization of knowledge that may be shared and become public and that we know as "culture." Any knowledge significant enough to become stabilized and publicly shared may also be considered significant enough to be inscribed and conserved in material culture as well. Such inscribings—from the first flint tools to writing itself—provide cultural way stations for continuing mnemonic and reflexive traditions of cultural transmission and exegesis.

The Significance of Cognitive Science for the Study of Religion

What exactly can a cognitive science of religion contribute to the study of religion that has otherwise been lacking? Cognitive science cannot, of course, explain all religious data. While, for example, cognitive science has little to say about the meanings claimed for specific cultural constructions, it *can* explain the ubiquity of religion among virtually all human societies, past and present. It can offer naturalistic explanations for recurring patterns that have long been noted among the diversities of religious expressions. It can offer explanations for the modes of conservation and transmission employed by those particular constructions and for individual commitments to them. And it can express these explanations with some precision in ways that may be assessed from the wealth of ethnographic and historical data controlled by scholars of religion. For example, the previously discussed cognitive theories of religious behavior, of religious ideas and of religious persistence have all been, and continue to be, systematically assessed by anthropologists, archaeologists and historians. Results of this research to date broadly confirm the predictions of cognitive theories of religion (Barrett 2004; Whitehouse 2004; Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004; Whitehouse and Martin 2004).

In addition to proposing specifically *cognitive theories* of religion, the cognitive sciences can also contribute to three issues in the larger study of religion. They can help to stipulate the kinds of data that might be included—and excluded—from such an area of study, they can provide a framework for organizing and evaluating the history of religions, and they can offer a non-ethnocentric basis for comparing religions.

Defining "Religion"

A comprehensive definition of religion—and consequently the focus and scope of its study—has long been debated. Proposals for such a definition have ranged from those with parochial (theological or confessional) biases, to those with a universalizing but still quasi-religious ("sacred" or "spiritual") basis, to those shaped, however unintentionally, by Western conceptual categories (such as philosophical dualism) and/or political policies (colonialism). On the other hand, some functionalist definitions of religion (such as "ultimate concern") are so broad as to include virtually anything and exclude nothing. Some recent scholars have even conceded defeat in the definitional endeavor and advocate collapsing the study of religion into that of culture(s), posing then, of course, the even more daunting task of defining "culture," or they simply disregard the issue altogether and pursue their work without any explicit delineation for the data their work might include.

As with conceptions of "religion" as a natural kind that might provide an object for natural selection, there is, of course, no natural "thing" as "religion" in the world for which a "correct" definition might be agreed. "Religion" is, however, no less susceptible to definition as an *analytic category* than are other domains of culture such as "economics" or "politics." Analytic categories, in contrast to categories whose contents refer to natural kinds in the world, must be theoretically stipulated in a clear and explicit manner (which is not to say that referential categories don't present their own theoretical problems) and, consequently, be subject to assessment of their validity and utility rather than simply being idiosyncratically asserted or confessed.

What counts as "religious" data can be stipulated from a cognitivist perspective, as we have seen, as those ordinary behaviors and mental representations that are, however, legitimated by claims to the authority of superhuman agents. This definition, adapted from E. B. Tylor's classic "minimum definition of religion,"[106] has the advantage of stipulating what religion is *not*. Ideologies such as Marxism or world views such as Freudianism, for example, are excluded from considerations as religion, as are those patterned, repetitive human acts characteristic of such sports as football and often analyzed as "religious" ritual. Whatever the functional similarities to religious ideas and practices that may be exhibited by such cultural expressions, they make no claim upon superhuman agency.

106 E. B. Tylor's well-known "minimum definition of Religion" is "the Belief in Spiritual Beings" (Tylor 1958 [1871], 8).

Some may object that "legitimating claims to the authority of superhuman agency" as a stipulation for what counts as "religion" excludes certain forms of "atheistic" religious thought, such as Buddhist, Taoist or Confucian. However, anyone with minimal experience "in the field"—even as tourists—will recognize that the actual practices of the overwhelming majority of participants in such traditions involve an acknowledgement of and devotion to superhuman agency. Such positions of "religious atheism" are espoused by a very small number of intellectuals in these traditions. In fact, cognitivists have demonstrated that a dissonance between intellectual formulations and actual practice is a common feature of religions (Barrett 2004; Slone 2004). Confessional acceptance of a deity as omniscient, for example, does not negate a confessor's impulse regularly to convey information to that deity through prayer.

Further, the minimum definition of religion differentiates "religious" behaviors and concerns from those associated with other social systems, whether or not such differentiations are made emically. Since "religious" and "political" systems, for example, both claim legitimacy by appeal to the power of authority, the one is often embedded in the other, as was the case with ancient Greece and Rome. And whereas "religious" systems are often virtually identified with moral traditions, especially by biblically-based religions, this is not necessarily the case for other traditions, as is again exemplified by ancient Greece where representations of deities exhibited wide moral latitude in contrast to the ethical authority of the philosophers. Rather, evolutionary biologists have argued that distributions of power and systems of morality are elaborations upon and codifications of evolved behavioral tendencies, such as relationships of dominance-submission, reciprocal altruism, a concern and ability to detect cheaters, etc.

In addition to Tylor's minimal definition of religion, an additional "Durkheimian" caveat stipulates that religious representations are those that are "costly" (in terms of resources, time, labor, cognitive effort, etc.).[107] When, in other words, social elaborations of ordinary concerns and behaviors are legitimated by costly appeals to superhuman authority, we may consider them to be "religious."

Still, questions for further research are posed by stipulating "religion" as costly claims to the authority of superhuman agency. How are those superhuman agents deemed to have certain attributes worthy of that costly behaviour within a particular culture to be distinguished from the proliferation of superhuman agents that are "naturally" produced by the mind but held within that same culture to be insignificant? How are gods to be distinguished from figures of folklore

107 For Durkheim, religion "always presupposes that the worshipper gives some of his substance or his goods to the gods" (Durkheim 1915, 385).

such as fairies or trolls? How are the "true" (culturally accepted) deities to be distinguished from "false" gods, from newly revealed deities or from those imported from another cultural context? Are there cognitive predispositions for such valuations and differentiations or are they simply a matter of sociohistorical construction? But how then do we explain those constructions.

Nevertheless, the stipulation of religious data as those that are legitimated by claims of superhuman agency which result in costly behaviour emphasizes that the study of religion requires no privileged approach or method but rather is the study of ordinary human activities, the "supernatural" inflections of which prove to be quite natural (Boyer 2001). Ironically, this cognitively informed definition of religion returns to and builds upon proposals by the nineteenth-century proponents of a scientific study of religion (Tylor, Durkheim), but it contributes a naturalistic foundation, a theoretical formulation and an analytic precision that were previously unavailable to earlier definitions. It is this more precise definition that can provide a clearly stipulated theoretical object, heretofore absent, for historical and comparative studies of religion.

The Historical Study of Religions

In addition to providing historians of religion with a clearly defined theoretical object, cognitive science can provide them with a theoretical framework for explaining and understanding past expressions of religion. Evolutionary psychologists and cognitive archaeologists have taught us that a fundamental architecture of human cognition is the product of our evolutionary history. The capacities and constraints that are characteristic of this organic architecture, consequently, can allow historians to discriminate between and organize their culturally variable data in ways that are consonant with processes that are common to all human cognition rather than conflating such data as the singular product of a common time and place. For example, a particular religious practice judged to be an example of Whitehouse's imagistic mode of religiosity might well have a history incommensurate with that of one judged to be doctrinal, even if those two histories have conventionally been considered to be of the "same" tradition. Or the successful spread and establishment of one religion in the face of its alternatives might be explicable in terms of its adopted modality or its attraction to innate cognitive templates rather than in terms of its contents, which, in a common cultural context, are likely to be similar.

Further, cognitive science can contribute insights into how and why some historical events and representations but not others that may have been historically possible were selected, remembered and transmitted over time. For exam-

ple, the acceptance of a new or imported religious practice might be attributed, in part at least, to its relative absence in the traditional ritual system and, therefore, provides a balance within that system. Or the successful spread of a new religion might simply be attributed to its attractiveness to intuitive cognitive proclivities rather than to similarities with traditional expressions.

The historical record, in other words, is not only limited by historical antecedents and cultural contingencies but is constrained by mental processes that are common to all humans. Based upon the predictable patterns of the latter, historians can construct historical trajectories that can help fill in the gaps of historical knowledge—especially when the data are incomplete or fragmentary, as of course, historical data mostly are. And they can do so with greater accuracy and with more nuance than they could if working from historical remains alone. Such a pursuit has already begun to produce significant research in the historical study of religion (See e. g. Whitehouse and Martin 2004).

The Comparative Study of Religion

The nineteenth-century recognition of different religious traditions from around the world and the desire in some way to compare these traditions provided the very impetus for the founding of an academic study of religion. For many, this comparative perspective is what continues to inform and to motivate the academic study of religion. If, however, our own past is, as the saying goes, a foreign country, how much more so is the past—and the present—of others.

As scholars of religion began to amass detailed knowledge of the various cultures of the world and of their local religious expressions and traditions, they produced ever-growing compilations of their "phenomenal" characteristics. Cultural studies in the latter half of the twentieth century have revealed that the innumerable traits catalogued in these "phenomenographies" of religion were largely organized in Western, if not specifically Christian (colonial), categories. Such scholarly biases, together with an emphasis on the autonomy of particular cultural formations, correctly called the comparative method into question. The evolved capacities and constraints of human cognition can, however, provide a metric of universal human possibilities in terms of which the vast diversity of human cultures—and their religious expressions—might be measured and in terms of which they have been historically and socially constructed (See e. g. Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004). A comparative study of religions cannot, in other words, be pursued productively at the level of their cultural expressions and meanings but must be based in the generative level of cognitive structure.

Related Theoretical Initiatives

Cognitive theories of religion have generated, and continue to generate, a wealth of experimental, analytic and applied research. Research from related social sciences remain, however, relatively unexploited by cognitive scientists of religion, e. g. that of ethology, evolutionary psychology and behavioral economics

Ethologists employ evolved animal behaviors as a basis for explaining the cultural behavior of humans—including the religious (e. g., Burkert 1996). Sociobiologists seek to explain both animal and human behavior on the basis of evolutionary history and genetic makeup (e. g., E. O. Wilson 1998, Ch. 11). Both ethologists and sociobiologists have, however, tended to overstate their case by suggesting direct relationships between their data and religious behaviors and expressions. In other words, they take little account of cognitive processing in the complex process of cultural production. On the other hand, ethological research, especially primatology, has offered insights into the evolutionary history of human cognitive potentials while fundamental conclusions by sociobiologists concur with similar conclusions by cognitivists—about evolved constraints upon human sociality, for example, such as those based on the limitations of short-term memory upon information processing or those governing optimal group size.

The role of emotion in religion should also be noted. Emotion (and its related senses of "significant experience" or "emotion-laden thought and perception") is, today, perhaps the most widespread popular "theory" of religion. Religions have their origin, or their "essence," according to this view, in religious experiences or in feelings of spirituality, the paradigm of which is mysticism. This popular view about the causal significance of an inward experience for the origin of or basis for religion in contrast to institutional externalities and practices is largely the consequence of Protestant theological claims. Nevertheless, religious claims and practices are universally correlated with (as opposed to caused by) heightened feelings and emotional display. Although the significance of emotion for religion has been acknowledged in connection with "special agent rituals" and with the mnemonic strategies of the imagistic mode of religious transmission, a comprehensive theory of the relation between emotion and religious cognition has yet to be fully undertaken (but see Pyysiäinen 2004, Ch. 5).

Economic models, such as rational choice theory, have also proposed useful and insightful explanations for religious behaviors and ideas (see Young 1997). Such models are based, however, in classic economic theorizing which assumes that individual humans are rational agents who act in their own self-interest. This view has recently been challenged by the revisionist work of behavioral

economists in light of insights concerning cognitive and emotional constraints on human rationality (e. g., Ariely 2008); for example, little to no correlation has been found between moral reasoning and moral behavior. While behavioral economics is increasingly influential for an understanding of human decision making generally, it has not yet been employed in the study of religion.

Challenges and Conclusion

The cognitive sciences are a relatively new area of study. They have, however, firmly established their basic principles and are poised to make dramatic breakthroughs over the coming century, both in new areas of discovery and application as well as in an integration of their fundamental theoretical premises. This is no less the case with the even more recent cognitive science of religion. As with any new discipline, however, basic challenges remain.

Challenges

If the cognitive sciences, including the cognitive science of religion, are to realize a comprehensive set of scientific explanations, then the relationship of cognitive functions to their neurological base, to neurochemical/hormonal effects, etc., must ultimately be identified. While cognitivists acknowledge the neurophysiological basis of cognition, the present state of knowledge does not yet allow for a close modelling of this relationship, although plausible theories are being proposed and significant research is beginning to emerge. Different mental functions, for example, have been associated with specific areas of the brain and the neural mechanisms of some of these functions, what we experience as memory, for example, have begun to be tracked at the molecular level.

On the other hand, caution must be exercised about interpreting neurophysiological functions—those revealed by brain imaging, for example—as causal rather than as correlative data for such "states of mind" as "religious" experiences. This identity of neurophysiological activity with particular mental representations neglects mediating levels of cognitive processing as well as the significance of environmental factors upon the expression of those mental representations and for their transmission. Such correlative data have even been evoked as proofs for the objective validity of specific religious claims, a fallacy of the so-called "neurotheology" that is reminiscent of some sociobiological and ethological conclusions about religious practices and ideas.

If a comprehensive explanation for the organization and functions of human cognition based upon the material conditions of brain activity has not yet been fully realized, neither has a comprehensive explanation for the connection between cognition and culture, though scientific explanations for this connection is sometimes resisted. Least constructively, some have raised the old caveat of reductionism. Others, who have devoted their professional life to cultural studies but who nevertheless wish to include human cognition in their considerations, have been drawn to theories that are more congenial to conventional cultural studies, those associated with narrativity and imagination, for example (e. g., Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

Of the first, reductionistic, concern, it might simply be noted that, from a scientific perspective, theoretical reduction (in contrast to a reduction of the data) is what is recognized as progress in knowledge (Slingerland 2008, Ch. 6). The second concern arises from perceptions that cognitivists are neglecting culture in favor of brain research. This is a somewhat surprising concern since leading cognitive scientists of religion have, in fact, addressed and emphasized just this connection and have offered plausible suggestions for precisely this connection (e. g. Sperber 1996; Lawson and McCauley 1990; Boyer 2001; Atran 2002; Whitehouse 2004). If comprehensive suggestions for the exact connections between cognition and culture remain tentative, however, it is because cognitive science is a new science and it is important for this new science to map precisely the forms and functions of human cognition before they are related to the conclusions of the past 150 years of cultural studies.

If cognitive science is finally to be applicable to a study of "religion," then those cognitive mechanisms and processes that generate cultural formations, such as the "religious," must be specifically identified as must those that, in turn, may be altered by environmental factors, including the social and cultural (see now Smail 2008). Although social and cultural theorists may have to relinquish certain of their conventional presumptions, about the *sui generis* autonomy of culture, for example (Tooby and Codmides 1992; Atran 2002), they are as capable of addressing the connection between cognition and culture as are cognitivists—a potential contribution presciently noted by one of the founders of sociological studies.[108]

108 "Society exists and lives only in and through...individual minds," Durkheim wrote. "If...the beliefs, traditions and aspirations of the group were no longer felt and shared by the individuals, society would die" (Durkheim 1915, 359).

Conclusion

Religious actions derive from the basic repertoire of ordinary human behaviors that are predicated by counterintuitive ideas, which are, however, also natural products of human cognition. The ready grasp of such behaviors and ideas from a very early age attests to this "naturalness,' i.e., to the cognitive ease whereby they are produced and to the readiness of our cognitive acceptance of, and even commitment to, their cultural valuations and manipulations. Because of this naturalness, it is unlikely that religiosity will ever wither away from the activities and ideas of our species. Despite the predictions of many social scientists, "religious" ideas and behavior continue to persist as an "intuitive" category that is documented from virtually all human societies. Because of this intuitive "naturalness" of "religion"—even among the community of religious scholars—cultural studies of "religion" have also proven to be unreliable as an academic pursuit, especially in any scientific sense envisioned by its founders. The cognitive science of religion, on the other hand, can formulate hypotheses about behaviors and ideas deemed "religious' as predictions that are intersubjectively testable, not only by experimentalists but, guided by their experimental designs and predictions, also by ethnographers and historians. Such study, like the cognitive sciences generally, will require broad interdisciplinary cooperation; its achievements will be those of a community of scholars working together scientifically over the coming decades.

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15. The Promise of Cognitive Science for the Study of Early Christianity

> Mind is the material of history...If history is not a mere puppet show, then it must be the history of mental processes...[T]hose matters which come first in the rational order of things—the cognitive functions of the mind—come last from the standpoint of our awareness and our observation.
>
> –Georg Simmel (1905, vii, 39, 43)

If, as the German sociologist and philosopher of history Georg Simmel suggested at the beginning of the last century, "the material of history" is—in the phrasing of his English translator—"the cognitive functions of the mind" ("*die Erkenntnisfunktion des Geistes*"; in the fifth edition of his work, he speaks also of "*die psychologische Tatsätlichkeit*[*en*]" [Simmel 1923, 4]), then history can be defined as the history of mental representations. The history of religions, then, would be the history of representations of superhuman agents—those legions of deities and devils, angels and demons, spirits and saints that inhabit all religious traditions—and of those ideas and practices that have been legitimated by claims to their authority. And since cognitive scientists have now shown that the superhuman inflections of such claims are the products of quite ordinary cognitive functions (Boyer 2001), the history of religions requires no special *heilsgeschichtliche* method (see Simmel 1905, 59; Collingwood 1956, 9; Lease 2003). The methodological problems that confront the historian of religions are, in other words, no different from those that arise in any historical study.

Whereas historians have traditionally been concerned with mapping the influences of historical antecedents and contexts on their evidence, cognitivists are concerned with mapping the influences and constraints of human cognition upon these same data. By understanding mental representations as the products of neurophysiological functions, they join the array of possible material explanations for historical formations alongside, for example, those of geopolitical or economic forces (Boyer 2003; on the materiality of the mental, see also Godelier 1986). The historical record is constrained, in other words, not only by antecedents and exigencies explicit in the environment of brains but also by implicit capacities and innate constraints characteristic of mind itself. Because historical remains are mental representations, externally inscribed and preserved, historians must be able to discriminate between and to organize their fragmentary and incomplete remains in ways consonant with the ubiquitous processes and dynamics of the "mental processes" ("*psychischer Vorgänger*") that produced them. An understanding of these data in both their explicit and implicit totality can contribute to historians pursuing their reconstructive work with greater con-

fidence than might be the case when they work from the influence of explicit factors alone.

In this paper, I should like to reflect on the work of the historian and on the appropriateness and utility of cognitive theorizing for historical method. I shall attempt to illustrate that utility with reference to the historical study of early Christianity.

1. Cognition and history

a) Historical thinking is a natural form of cognition

Historians and cognitivists alike have argued that historical thinking is a natural form of human cognition. The American historian Carl Becker, for example, writing in 1932, already argued that "everyman [is] his own historian" (Becker 1969). By analogy to the mathematical operation of reducing a fraction to its lowest terms, Becker reduced the conventional view of history, the "knowledge of events that have occurred in the past," to a view of history as "the memory" of what historians since Hegel have termed "*res gestae*"—"things said and done" (Becker 1969, 7; Hegel 1861, 60). Becker considered such memories to be "essential to the performance of the simplest acts of daily life" (Becker 1969, 10). We create the fiction of our quotidian present, he argued, "by robbing the past," that is, "by holding on to the most recent events and pretending they all belong to our immediate perceptions" (Becker 1969, 11). By tacitly "reënforcing and enriching" "immediate perceptions," we are able, thereby, to "live in a world of semblance more spacious and satisfying than is to be found within the narrow confines of the fleeting present moment." It is these memories of what we have said and done, Becker concluded, that is the "fundamental thing which enables...[each and all of us] to have...a history" (Becker 1969, 10 – 11). Researchers ranging from phenomenologists to neuroscientists have arrived at similar conclusions (Lloyd 2004, 249 – 332). Our ordinary mnemonic proclivity for producing a historical consciousness is, in other words, simply "our psychological condition at rest, a way of thinking that requires little effort and [that] comes quite naturally" (Wineburg 2001, 19). This natural cognitive process underlies our human proclivity for and familiarity with such narrative representations as histories, dramatic presentations and religious myths.

b) Historiographical thinking is a historicized form of natural cognition

If historical thinking reflects an ordinary process of human cognition, *historiographical* thinking represents a specialized and professionalized version of this ordinary process (Becker 1969, 16–23; Collingwood 1956, 268; see also Sutton 1998, 207). Such professionalization represents a particularized configuration of mental representations that results from an interaction of historians' cognitive systems with their own environment and that, consequently, become imposed upon the ambiguities of their data. The historicized cognition of professional historians retains from natural cognition, in other words, an inevitable tendency towards representing the past in terms of contemporary sensibilities, a species of ethnocentrism known to historians as "presentism" (see Simmel 1905, 47; Donald 1991, 1). This "presentism" is characteristic not only of modern historiography but, of course, of the production of the historical evidence itself—as biblical scholars are well aware.

2. The presentism of historicized cognition

a) The narrative bias of historians

A prominent example of historiographical presentism is the bias of professional historians for narrative accounts (after the Latin sense of *historia* rather than its Greek sense of "inquiry"), complete with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Aristotle *Poetica* 7.3). This narrative bias is so great that historians have often sought stories where none may have existed. For example, historians of Graeco-Roman religions have sought for decades to discover the mythological narrative(s) of Mithraism by decoding the rich remains of its material culture. Mithraism seems, however, to have maintained no widely adhered to myth or story since it never developed—as did Christianity—any centralized institutional structure capable of sustaining a shared narrative (Martin 2005a). Nevertheless, some cognitively inspired researchers have concluded that the predominance of narrative behavior and evidence documented from the past five thousand years simply represents "the way we think" (e. g., Turner 1996; Fauconnier-Turner 2002). Such researchers omit, however, consideration of how mental representations become blended into enduring narrative structures—if they are. Nor do they offer any cognitive basis for the broad appeal of some but not all of these narratives to audiences beyond the social contexts of their production (Stiller *et al.* 2003, 398).

In a preliminary study of Shakespeare's plays, for example, Stiller, Nettle and Dunbar have suggested that successful stories—those that are often told

and that have become widely disseminated—reflect thematic representations of life as they have been shaped by behavioral ecology. These themes include mate choice, for example, or those of survival, group cohesion, or the triumph of heroes in the face of diversity (Stiller *et al*. 2003; see now Gottschall and Wilson 2005).

In addition to such representational thematics, Stiller *et al*. concluded that successful stories seem also to be structured by cognitive constraints, whereby the cognitive load of such stories challenges, without exceeding limits upon, the social cognition of intended readers. While the total number of characters in a given story may approach thirty or forty, for example, the possibilities of social interactions our cognitive machinery is able to handle is limited to fifteen or fewer main characters, the size of actual groups of close friends. And the number of speaking characters whose mental states a reader is readily able to follow at any one time is limited to three or four in any particular episode. If, for dramatic reasons or for those of historical content, more characters are deemed necessary to the narrative structure, the cognitive burden of the reader is eased by the construction of serial episodes, of plots within plots, or by the insertion of helpful mnemonic references (Stiller *et al*. 2003; Dunbar *et al*. 2005, 140–141, 144–145). It would be telling to analyze such narrative constructions as the New Testament gospels in light of these constraints.

i. The analogical evidence of material culture

A number of anthropologists and evolutionary psychologists have argued that not all historically fixed cognition is organized syntactically as narrative; some may be organized paratactically as *analogia rerum gestarum* (e.g., Bateson 1972, 372–374, 411–425; Barth 1975, 207–214; 1987, 69–70, 75; Donald 1991, 337; Whitehouse 2000, 64–65, 88–91; 2004, 44–45, 100–104, 114–118). In contrast to the logical (or linear) organization of narrative thinking, the neuroscientist Gerald Edelman has associated such analogical thinking with selectionism and pattern recognition (Edelman 2004, 147). While the products of such analogical abilities "can be richly creative," they are necessarily ambiguous (Edelman 2004, 147; on cognitive analyses of analogy, see, Gentner *et al*. 2001). The ambiguity of material culture, which may be encoded either narratively or analogically, is a case in point.

The uncertainty concerning the encoding of Christian material culture, for example, arises from the fact that this evidence contradicts the gospel narratives on virtually all of its central themes. The cross, for example, and sacrificial representations surrounding the cross such as the "eucharistic" meal of bread and wine, are not documented from Christian material culture until the fourth centu-

ry (Snyder 2003, 58 – 64). Some of this imagery is clearly organized typologically, a technique for establishing analogies—in the case of some Christian material culture, between the Old and New Testaments (Malbon 1990, 42 – 43). But what of the rest? As the biblical scholar Niels Peter Lemche has rightly concluded, the question of exactly how the remains of material culture should be read is itself a historical conclusion "to be demonstrated and not accepted in advance of the historical analysis" (Lemche 1998, 30). Nevertheless, neither biblical scholars nor historians of religion have yet even attempted to integrate the evidence of Christian material culture into their histories of early Christianity, even though a comprehensive survey of this evidence was published a quarter of a century ago (Snyder 1985, rev. 2003).

ii. The textual evidence for analogies

Yet another identifiable mode of human thinking may be termed an *enumeratio rerum gestarum*, that is, a cataloging of things said and done. Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued, for example, that the proliferation of concepts throughout human cultures is the consequence of differential processes of classification that are based upon a natural human concern to enumerate properties of the observers' environment (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 1 – 10). Such enumerated representations of knowledge are encoded as clusters of information that are organized visually, independent of any grammar or phonography (Donald 1991, 285 – 292), such as lists (Gordon 1996) and taxonomies (Foucault 1970, 218). Richard Gordon has concluded that such "spatial organization[s] of material[s]," independent of any "authorial presence," claims authority for the autonomy of paratactic or analogical representations (Gordon 1996, 199). And Lera Boroditsky has argued that we develop a temporal sense of sequentially, requisite for narrative, by analogy to our prior visual and tactile experiences of space (Boroditsky 2000).

Whereas analogies, and even narratives, may drift over time in order to maintain maximum memorability (Sperber 1966, 95), extensive lists or complex taxonomies are difficult to encode in working memory (Miller 1956). Rather, they increasingly require external memory devices in order more accurately to fix and to preserve information, as surviving invoices, genealogies and astronomical tables in early Mesopotamian cuneiform writing instantiate.

As biblical scholars well know, the earliest evidence for the early Christianities are enumerations of the sayings of Jesus, Q and the Gospel of Thomas, for which the underlying principles of association—if any—remain contested but which certainly are not organized according to any discernible narrative structure. In addition to these Christian materials, we might also mention listing in the Graeco-Roman magical texts (Gordon 1999), the numerous anthologies of po-

etic and philosophical *florilegia* common to the Hellenistic period (Chadwick 1969) and the *Florilegium* or eschatological *Midrash* from Qumran (4QFlor) (Allegro 1956, 176; 1958). Such enumerated representations of knowledge are so significant a part of the historical record of Western antiquity that some biblical scholars, following historians of Mesopotamian antiquity, have even proposed establishing a field of *Listenwissenschaft* (von Soden 1936; Alt 1951; see the discussion by Smith 1982, 44–48). Might such lists of sayings be organized on analogical rather than serial principles?

While analogies can, of course, be presented in story form, narrative does not, to repeat, represent the *only* way *Homo sapiens* think; it represents rather but *one* way we think. And how knowledge is thought will, in the conclusion of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth, "entail a definition of the nature of the object of knowledge" (Barth 1987, 75).

b) Historicized cognition and the problem of periodization

In addition to the narrative bias of historians, a further example of "presentism" is exemplified by the way in which professional historians have shaped and prejudged their evidence—however evaluated—by framing it in cultural contexts and historical periods. Situating historical data in their cultural context, of course, explains nothing; rather, it is the culture context that requires explanation (Lawson-McCauley 1993; Atran 2002, 10; Tooby-Cosmides 1992).

Anticipating by almost fifty years arguments about culture as an abstraction requiring explanation, Karl Popper argued that "history" too is such an abstraction (Popper 1950, 463). While historical generalizations, such as periodizations, have heuristic warrant if explicitly and carefully stipulated, they often represent distortions of the historical evidence born of the interests of professional historians. Is, for example, a Hellenistic period of religious history, to be described politically as the period between the conquests of Alexander and those of Augustus, as this age was originally delineated by J. G. Droysen (Droysen 1836, I: 3)? Is a new Christian period of religious history also to be described politically from the birth of Jesus in the time of this same Caesar Augustus, as New Testament theologians so eagerly accepted on the basis of the Lukan testament (Lk. 2:1–7)? Or might a Hellenistic period of *religious* history better be periodized as culminating with the legitimization of Christianity by Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century—or more decisively, with the official establishment of Christianity over non-Christian religions that was decreed by Theodosius at the end of that century (Martin 1983, 132–137)? And is the so-called Great Man theory of history, itself a revision of eighteenth-century political criteria for peri-

odization in light of the values of nineteenth-century romanticism (e. g., Thomas Carlyle 1840), the best way in which to organize the ideas and events originated from and transmitted by ordinary human minds at all—whether that great man is Alexander or Augustus, Constantine or Theodosius, Jesus or Paul? Might not twentieth-century histories of *mentalités*, influenced by anthropological methods, provide more adequate criteria for historiographical periodization (Martin 2004b)? From a cognitive perspective, of course, *mentalités* would not be understood as the product of social construction but as a consequence of distributed mental representations, transmitted on the basis, perhaps, of the epidemiological model suggested by Dan Sperber (Sperber 1996), or perhaps more intentionally, as proposed by the cognitive anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse (2004).

c) Cognition, transmission and history

Historians are concerned with matters of transmission, perhaps preeminently so. Not every mental representation that is possible is successfully transmitted and not all mental representations that are transmitted become public. As this important insight is expressed by Whitehouse,

> religion [for example] is not the sum of all mental events, actions, and artifacts created by religious people. Rather, it consists of all those private and public representations that have become widely distributed as recognizably similar tokens of the same thing...And so, the challenge of...[a history of religions] is, first and foremost, one of identifying particular mechanisms that drive the selection of culturally widespread representations in preference to all the other representations that fleeting occur in [or, we might add, that are imported into] any population (Whitehouse 2004, 7; see Lawson 1994).

To identify these mechanisms of selection, Whitehouse has proposed a theory of divergent modes of religious transmission, which he terms "doctrinal" and "imagistic." According to Whitehouse's theory, these divergent modes of religiosity are the consequence of an interrelationship between and interdependency among multiple variables, an epistemological premise that is familiar to historians and evolutionary theorists alike (Gaddis 2002, 53; Donald 1991: 139). These variables include the alternative ways by which religious knowledge is processed and encoded, the ways by which this knowledge relies on and is constrained by different systems of memory, and the ways by which the scale and structure of religious traditions and their patterns of distribution and transformation are determined over time.

The doctrinal modality is characterized by a set of beliefs, which must remain stable, and/or by practices, the performance of which must be precise,

and which become encoded in semantic memory through repetition as a set of scripts or schemas. Such scripted doctrines and practices are themselves readily repeatable and are, consequently, readily able to be distributed by missionaries and teachers beyond the core group. If a hierarchical leadership and centralized structure is developed to control and to maintain these doctrines and practices, they can become the basis for widespread community.

By contrast, the mode of transmission characteristic of the imagistic modality is infrequently performed rituals that exhibit high sensory pageantry, epitomized by dramatic, even traumatic, initiatory rites. The emotional salience generally associated with such dramatic events ensures that they will be encoded in the episodic or autobiographical memory system from which recall is relatively precise. Although any initially shared meaning for these enigmatic events may well remain occluded with personal constructions of analogical significance resulting, a strong sense of group solidarity will be produced among fellow participants since their recall will focus upon the details of those who have together experienced such terrifying ordeals. This sense of "kinship," forged under common conditions of stress, results in a perseverance of small face-to-face communities. And although the analogical meanings attributed such ordeals by individual participants may become shaped over time by the initiating authorities, the resulting corpus of knowledge will remain local, a characteristic of the initiatory group.

By the first century AD, religious traditions in the Roman world had indeed diverged into the modalities predicted by Whitehouse.

3. Towards a cognitive history of Roman religions (including the early Christianities)

a) Divergent modes of religious transmission in the Roman world

The official state religion of the Roman Empire conformed to the variables predicted by Whitehouse for the doctrinal mode of religiosity. Roman religion was concerned with "the meaning of Roman life and history" (Beard *et al.* 1998, I: 75. 113), and the values of this "Romanness" (Turcan 1996, 195) were transmitted and codified through countless iterations and reiterations of sacrificial practices that resulted in a set of officially sanctioned ritual scripts. By the time of the Empire, these scripts were maintained and transmitted by a hierarchy of religio-political authorities: domestically by the *paterfamilias*, by the *magister* of the *collegia*, and at the state level by the public priests or, upon occasion, by action of the Roman Senate itself (Scheid 2003, 79 – 80). From 12 BC, all of the "fixed and for-

mal" practices of Roman religion became subject to prescribed and precise regulations (Pliny *Naturalis Historia* 28.11; Beard *et al.* 1996, II: 129) that were controlled, according to the first century AD Roman historian Valerius Maximus, by "the knowledge of the *pontifices*" (Val. Max. 1.1.1a-b; Beard *et al.*1998, I: 192).

In contrast to the doctrinal modality of the official Roman religion, an imagistic mode of religiosity became widely and popularly instantiated throughout the Roman Empire by the Hellenistic mystery cults, especially those of Dionysus, Cybele, Isis, and Mithras, from the first and second centuries AD. The dramatic initiatory practices of these cults, aptly termed "rites of terror," began with preparations that included somatic and psychological deprivations such as fasting, meditation and, perhaps, psychotropic medication. The rites themselves were held in darkness and involved exposure to life-threatening ordeals—or at least threat of such—and employed such dramatic effects as light shows, displays of bizarre imagery, the use of masks and costumes, and sounds of evocative rhythms produced by exotic instruments and chanting. Finally, the initiates emerged from the psychological disorientation of their nocturnal ordeals into an anticipated light of cognitive reorientation that was termed in the Graeco-Roman world "rebirth" (Thomassen 2003, 221). In contrast to the repetitive routines that were characteristic of ritual practice in the doctrinal modality, such ritually induced "experiences" of enlightenment could only be encoded into the episodic memory system of initiates as unique events to be recalled as the focus for what Whitehouse terms "spontaneous exegetical reflections." Such personal revelations, over time, could be consolidated into the local knowledge characteristic of such initiatory groups or, at best, of regionally proximate cells (Martin 2005b).

Although scholars generally identify the sundry mystery traditions on the basis of their claims upon a common patron deity, none of these cults, to our knowledge, ever developed even the idea of centralized organization. In the absence of such bureaucratic structure, any religious ideas or practices attributed by historians to these associations in common remain incidental inferences from a shared culture (Smith 1990, 116 – 142) or historiographical confabulations.

The proliferation of small-scale groups in the face of Roman imperialism is unsurprising given the evolutionary history of *H. sapiens*. As Pascal Boyer has observed:

> our systems for social interaction did not evolve in the context of vast groups and abstract institutions...We evolved as small bands of foragers and that kind of existence is the context in which we developed the special features of our social mind. Sedentary settlements, large tribes, kingdoms and other such modern institutions are [a very recent development] (Boyer 2001, 250).

When large-scale political societies did develop, Boyer notes, people nevertheless still tended to cluster in face-to-face "solidarity-based groups" (Boyer 2001, 249). As I have noted elsewhere, the United States, for example, is rife with what the nineteenth-century French observer Alexis de Tocqueville described as "secondary associations" (de Tocqueville 1900, II.2.5). As a more recent observer has noted, again with reference to the United States, such subcultures arise and flourish most notably "in places that lack rootedness" (Sides 1992, 17–18). It was such a decline in traditional locative definitions of sociality that was characteristic of the Hellenistic world and that occasioned the rise of secondary associations throughout the Roman Empire (Martin 2004a).

Boyer reports further that such "solidarity-based groups" always tend to be of "the same size and involve similar emotions, regardless of the country, language, size of the institution or town, and other differences" (Boyer 2001, 249). The ubiquity of such predictable social characteristics suggests the operation of panhuman constraints. Arguments have been made, for example, that the extent of group size—like the number of characters in a successful story—is structured by constraints upon the information processing capacities of human brains (Dunbar 1993) and by those of short-term memory (D'Andrade 1995, 42–44). The emergence and perseverance of small-scale societies represents, it would seem, an evolutionary and cognitive optimum for sociopolitical organization by *H. sapiens* (Tiger and Fox 1971, 238–239; Willhoite 1981, 251). The early Chrstianities offer no exception.

b) Divergent modes of religious transmission among the early Christianities

Since publication in 1934 of Walter Bauer's influential *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, historians and biblical scholars have increasingly recognized that the evidence for early Christianity documents a plurality of small, autonomous groups, similar to those familiar from the Hellenistic mysteries. The historiographical task has been, first of all, to discriminate among these various early Christian groups, which biblical scholars have accomplished on the basis of their *form-, traditions-, and redaktionsgeschichtliche* inquiries into the textual productions of these groups. More recently, some biblical scholars have sought to discern from these texts, as from any social manufacture, what might be deduced about the various interests and intents of the differing groups that produced and transmitted them. Although these researchers have neglected the evidence of Christian material culture and attended solely to textual evidence, a commitment to the narrative record that continues to establish the agenda for their research, they have nevertheless proposed a tentative inventory

of various early "Christian" groups (Cameron-Miller 2004). Once differentiated, the evidence suggests that at least some of the early Christian groups conformed to the imagistic modality of religion described by Whitehouse and documented from Graeco-Roman religiosity generally.

i. Imagistic modalites among the early Christianities

Admission into the early Christian groups was by an initiatory rite of baptism (Thomassen 2003). Although it might be somewhat venturesome to characterize the initiatory rites of immersion practiced by these groups as "rites of terror," they were modeled, it would seem, on the still undomesticated desert practices of John the Baptist, especially as these are portrayed in Q (Mt 3: 7–10//Lk 3: 7–9) and in the synoptic gospels (Mt 3: 1–17; Mk 1: 2–11; Lk 3:1–22). The widespread influence of this enigmatic figure is further documented among the early Christianities from the gospels of John (Jn 1: 15–34), Thomas (GTh 46) and the Jewish-Christian Gospel of the Ebionites, in the epistles of Paul (I Cor. 12:13) and from early Church practices (Acts 2: 38–41), as well as from Christian material culture (Snyder 2003, 77, 111–122). Although the dramatic rites seemingly associated with early Christian baptism soon became replaced, among some groups at least, with *catacheses* (e.g., the *Didache*), second- and third-century sources still speak of preparations for this Christian rite that required the nakedness of initiates (Hippolytus *Traditio apostolica* 21.3*),* nocturnal fasts and vigils, confessions of sin (Tertullian *De baptismo* 20; Justin Martyr *Apologia* 1.61), renunciations of the devil, and daily exorcisms (Tertullian *De corona* 3; Hippolytus *Trad. apost.* 20.3). At the end of the second century, Tertullian could still compare Christian baptism with Mithraic initiatory rites (Tert. *De bapt.* 5; *De praescriptione. haereticorum* 40).

In addition to the cognitive shocks that may have been induced by early Christian rites of baptism, the parables of Jesus, which most certainly circulated independently of and prior to their subsequent narrative catchments, have been characterized as ambiguous stories drawn from everyday life whose analogical "vividness or strangeness" seem designed to deliver an "imaginative shock" to their hearers (Gragg 2011, following Dodd 1936: 5; Jeremias 1955; Funk 1966: 138–139). Similarly, the collected sayings of Jesus in Q and in the Gospel of Thomas have been described as being largely local, enigmatic and evocative (Mack 1993, 105; on the "local" character of these sayings, see Arnal 2001). In addition to the initiatory baptismal rites, in other words, the imaginative surprises that were conveyed by the parable and sayings traditions may well have induced among Christian converts the "spontaneous exegetical reflections" that are characteristic of the personal "revelations" predicted for the imagistic modality of

transmission. The opening challenge of the Gospel of Thomas to find "meaning" in the "obscure (or hidden)" sayings of Jesus exemplifies this technique as verbal expression (GTh 1) and recalls Richard Reitzenstein's suggestion at the beginning of the last century for the existence of *Lese-Mysterien* or "literary mysteries" in which "revelations" might be evoked through the written word (Reitzenstein 1927, 52, 64). The cognitive anthropologist Brian Malley has recently shown how one contemporary group of evangelical Christians is still able to find such personal meanings even from the canonical narratives of the Bible (Malley 2004).

ii. Doctrinal modalities of religion among early Christians

Initially, it seems as if Paul's revelatory experience of conversion might also conform to the variables predicted for the imagistic mode of religiosity. What Paul took to be "revelation," however, was apparently based upon his considered interpretation of some form of spontaneously excited neural activity rather than upon any such activity that had been ritually induced as a technique for the transmission of knowledge (Boyer 2003, 121). And indeed, Paul specifically emphasizes that his revelation was not the result of any mode of transmission (Gal. 1: 11–12). Rather, Paul insisted that salvific knowledge was not to be obtained through ritual practices such as baptism but by faith (Rom. 1: 16, 17; 3: 26, 28, 30, etc.). And although Paul acknowledged that he had, in fact, baptized a few people in Corinth, he nevertheless asserted that Christ had not sent him "to baptize but to preach" (I Cor. 1: 14–17). Although Pauline communities continued to practice baptism, this rite wasn't the initiatory ritual associated with revelation that it seemed to be for the Jesus groups but, rather, indicated membership in an anonymous (spiritual) community of correctly held faith (I Cor. 12: 13).

Paul's view of right faith is nowhere more clearly expressed than in his opposition to the charismatic practices of the Christian community in Corinth (1 Cor. 12)—yet another example of a Christian group operating on the basis of personal revelation. Paul insisted that such spiritual practices, and especially glossolalia, be regulated by instruction (*oikodomē*, *katēchēsis*) and by reasoned interpretation (*nous*, *diermēnia*) (1 Cor. 14: 5, 13–15). And he leaves little doubt that it is his own authority that is to be the criterion for the correctly reasoned interpretation to which the local revelations associated with spiritual practices must yield. For *his* teachings, he asserts, are themselves "a command of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14: 37). "If any one does not recognize this," Paul concludes, "he is not recognized" (1 Cor. 14: 38) and can, as Paul so bluntly put it, simply "go to hell" (*anathema estō*) (Gal. 1: 6–9).

Paul continued his didactic relationship with the communities he had founded through his subsequent correspondence with them, in which he persisted in attempting to formulate the tenants of his faith as an authoritative script to be learned and disseminated. Paul did not realize his vision of a centralized form of Christianity with himself as the arbiter of orthodoxy, even within his own "Pauline" communities, as ongoing disputes within them illustrates (e. g., Gal. 1. 6 – 9; I Cor. 1: 10 – 17). Nevertheless he articulated a principle of authority and transmission that later developed into the doctrinal modality of Christian orthodoxy (Meade 1987, 116 – 118), a development clearly evident in deutero-Pauline traditions (Meade 1987, 122 – 130).

c) The emergence of "the" Christian story

If enumerated or analogical forms of knowledge are permanently to survive and to be transmitted, they must be inscribed in some form of material culture, as was the case with Mesopotamian lists, or they must be blended into the more memorable and transmissible framework of narrative. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the sayings and parables attributed to Jesus, all of which initially circulated independently of any narrative structure, would, for mnemonic and transmissive reasons drift towards narratives that are readily rehearsed and widely comprehended (Sperber 1996, 95). But why, in the case of the early Christianities, was the drift that proved successful towards *biographical* narrative? Although the Greeks had long shown interest in the lives of their heroes, especially in their funerary orations, the biographical form *per se* seems only to have emerged late in the first century AD or early in the second with Plutarch's *Lives* and Arrian's *Life of Alexander*. While some of these tended towards apotheosis, none of them recounted the life of an incarnate deity.

Cognitive scientists of religion have shown that tacit apprehensions of gods seem always to ensure that they are represented as intentional agents capable of social interactions (e. g., Barrett 1998, 1999; Barrett and Keil 1996). These anthropomorphic representations of gods are cognitive constructions based upon our "theory of mind," our ability to attribute to others beliefs and desires like our own (Baron-Cohen 1995) and with whom, consequently, we can relate. Unlike accounts of great deeds by the august deities of Rome or of the salvific accomplishments of the cosmic gods of the Mysteries, the biographical narratives of Jesus constructed the Christian Son of God as a socially accessible and abiding friend. It is interesting to note that Mithras, the Roman *Sol Invictus*, has recently been re-represented by contemporary neo-paganists precisely as the beloved friend of initiates (Nabarz 2005, ix, 5), as, indeed, is his earliest association in the *Rig-Veda*

(Bivar 1994: 61). The biographical narratives into which the early Christian aphorisms and analogies were consolidated provided, in other words, a mnemonic framework for a story about a divine actor which was in greater accord with tacit cognitive templates than were those offered by alternative Roman religions. The cognitive appeal of these biographically framed consolidations was rendered even more attractive—and memorable—by the inclusion of miracle stories which grabbed the attention not only of the fictional characters of the narratives but that of the readers of these narratives as well.

The conventional privileging of self-interested narratives by historians has not resulted in any convincing historical explanations for the perseverance and dominance of one modality of Christianity in the face of its alternatives—Christian or non-Christian. Nor have efforts to discover the social interests of those traditions, since these descriptions tend to describe commonalties shared by the various contemporaneous social formations. It would seem, rather, that any historical explanation for the successful consolidation, perseverance, and eventual religious dominance of a particular form of Christian knowledge would benefit from a consideration of the ways by which mental processes have shaped these contents and the cognitive dynamics of their transmission.

Conclusion

Historiography sometimes seems fraught with insurmountable problems. Because of its generally incomplete character, a consequence both of accident and of intent, and its frequently ambiguous quality, historical evidence often appears to be incommensurable if not incomprehensible. Historians must always presume, therefore, some theoretical framework, whether acknowledged or not, if their historiographical accounts are to make any coherent sense (Simmel 1905, 47–51). As Simmel already proposed, historians may well benefit from acknowledging and beginning with mental reality, which comes "first in the rational order of things" and which might well invest historical remains with significance and pattern.

I do not intend to suggest that approaches to the past based on cognitive theorizing can or should replace the specialized methods of professional historians. I do propose, however, that the conclusions of cognitive scientists can offer well-founded theories that can supplement and provide correctives to these traditional tools. And it can do so by identifying and explaining data that have been produced by ordinary processes of human cognition but that have otherwise been neglected in favor of more explicit forms of data or evidence that historians have, for one reason or another, come to privilege. These theories can contribute

insights into how and why some representations of historical occurrences emerged, were selected for, and remembered but not others that may have been culturally, historically, or cognitively possible. They also promise explanations for how and why religious representations have been exploited as efficient ways by which elaborated and complex information, such as codes of behavior or morality, social knowledge, or political ideology have been legitimated and successfully transmitted over time.

Proposals for applying cognitive theorizing to historiographical methods raises questions concerning the employment of *any* theorizing for connecting the dots of surviving data. When, in other words, historians are confronted with insufficient evidence from which to piece together a plausible scenario for their historiographical reconstructions, how many data are required to justify completing that scenario on the basis of theoretical modeling? If, for example, a theory predicts the presence of a specific number of stipulated variables for organizing a particular historical scenario and some but not all of these variables are documented from the surviving evidence, are historians, in the absence of explicit evidence to the contrary, justified in filling out their target scenario on the basis of that theoretical model? What constitutes a sufficient number of the predicted variables responsibly to do so? And what, exactly, is the explanatory basis for the range of variables deployed in the first place? Such questions invoke, of course, the judgement of the historian, and instantiate why historiography, despite advances in scientifically based modeling, will never be an exact science—though it might become much more exact than when left solely to the subjective inferences of individual historians.

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16. Globalization, Syncretism, and Religion in Western Antiquity: Some Neurocognitive Considerations

Introduction: Globalization and syncretism

Conditions in the modern world have often been compared to those in antiquity. Of the many comparisons cited, however, modern processes of globalization and those of ancient imperial expansions have generally been neglected. The notion of "globalization" has, of course, been used to signify numerous kinds of transformations in international structures, relationships, and influences. If, however, we think of globalization as a process that challenges identity by place, by community, and by tradition, then it is relevant to compare contemporary processes of globalization with those of *oikoumenaí* past and, especially, with those of Western antiquity following the conquests of Alexander the Great and with the *pax romana* established by Augustus (Martin and Pachis 2004, 13–14; Hingley 2005).

As has been well-discussed, J. G. Droysen first described in 1836 a discrete period of "Hellenistic" political history extending from Alexander to Augustus. He characterized this period as a "*westöstlichen Völkermischung*" that resulted in a Hegelian "*Verschmelzung der Religionen und Kulte*" (Droysen 1836, "Vorrede"; cited from Droysen 1980, I: "Vorwort zur Zweiten Auflage," Droysen 1980, III, 447; Préaux 1978, 7). A century later, F. C. Grant pronounced that "the main characteristic feature of *all*...religion" during this period was "syncretism" (Grant 1953, iii; emphasis added). This view of Hellenistic religious syncretism became the basis for the use of this category in the history of religions generally and, subsequently, for its use in the contemporary social sciences. The category has, however, never achieved any consensual usage among historians of religion, much less among scholars from other areas of study.[109] Most often, however, this category seems to have been employed as a somehow self-evident

109 There is no entry for "syncretism" in either the multi-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (Seligman and Johnson 1930–1935) or the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Sills 1968–1976), or in its revised second edition (Darity 2007). There is a brief entry for the term in the one-volume *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, which equates syncretism with cultural change (Hunter and Whitten 1976, 378) and a somewhat longer entry in a more recent five-volume encyclopedia of the same title, which describes "syncretism" as a reconciliation of "disparate—and sometimes opposite—beliefs and practices"; "a blending of schools of thought" (Glazier 2006, 5: 2150)

explanation for *descriptions* of complex historical constructions resulting, usually unintentionally, from cultural contact.[110]

Despite a history in which Graeco-Roman cosmopolitanism provided a symbiotic model of globalization and syncretism, the concept of syncretism was scarcely mentioned by participants on the panel "Hellenisation, Empire, and Globalisation" organized for the 2003 meeting of the European Association for the Study of Religion which took as its general theme "The Globalization and Localization of Religion" (Martin and Pachis 2004)—perhaps the consequence of "syncretistic fatigue" born of an overuse of this imprecise notion. Only five of the nine contributors to the panel mentioned the term—three but in passing (Benavides 2004, 27, 32; Lease 2004, 107; Thomassen 2004, 251). While a fourth contributor, the historian of Graeco-Roman religions Panayotis Pachis, gave an insightful analysis of particular historical influences on the Egyptian cult of Isis over the course of its development (Pachis 2004), he retained an understanding of syncretism as resulting from influence of "the Greek way of thinking" (Pachis 2004, 165)—which was, of course, appropriate to this particular historical example. Only one contributor, Giulia Gasparro, also a historian of Graeco-Roman religions, paused in her response to the panel presentations to reflect upon the meaning of what she considered to be a "dubious category." "It is a well known fact clearly perceived within various polytheistic traditions of the ancient world," she wrote, that it is:

> possible to establish a more or less rigorous system of [functional] 'correspondences' between the various religious frameworks, according to a play of 'identifications'...without however completely losing the sense that each specific personage belongs to a particular cultural context" (Gasparro 2004, 48–49; see also Pachis 2004, 166; Martin 1983, 136–137).

Syncretism, identification, and selection

The "syncretistic" "play of identifications" and "correspondences" of which Gasparro spoke have frequently been exemplified from Book 11 of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. In an oft-cited passage, which has been evoked as the *locus classicus* of Hellenistic syncretism (Hammond and Scullard 1970. 1029), Apuleius identifies the goddess Isis with ten other goddesses and then has Isis proclaim that "my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world, in divers manners,

110 Intentional syncretisms are another matter, usually explainable as propagandistic, ideological, theological and/or political initiatives. The classic example of intentional syncretism from Western antiquity is Manichaeism (Burkitt 1925, 71; see Martin and Leopold 2004, 2: 98).

in variable customs, and by many names" (*Met*. 11.5)—a pronouncement that the classicist J. Gwyn Griffiths considered to be *the* "syncretistic formula of union" (Griffiths 1975, 144).

The question about employing this passage as the classical exemplar for syncretism is whether Apuleius' *theokrasia* instantiates a tenet of his neo-Platonic philosophy or whether it represents the historical situation of Hellenistic religiosity.[111] In considering this question, we might turn from Apuleius' philosophical fiction to a historical example from a religious tradition in which we might well expect to find syncretistic formations, namely, the Roman cult of Mithras, the single most widely spread as well as densely distributed religion of the Roman world.

In late third-century AD, Marcus Aurelius Decimus, governor of the Roman Province of Numidia (modern Algeria) from 283–284, and a Mithraist (Daniels 1975, 271; Clauss 1992, 247–248), dedicated an altar in the Roman colony of Diana Veteranorum (Aïn-Zana) with the inscription:

> *Iovi optimo maximo, Iunoni reginae, Minervae sanctae, Soli Mithrae, Herculi, Marti, Mercurio, genio loci, diis deabusque omnibus* (*CIMRM* 140).

Decimus didn't specifically identify these sundry deities with one another as did Apuleius with the Graeco-Roman goddesses of his novel. Rather, Decimus honored these deities as correlates *alongside* Mithras. An inscription from Rome to "those deities sharing a temple" (*tois synnaois theois*) with Mithras suggests that such associations were unexceptional in this cult (*CIMRM* 473). In fact, the historian Manfred Clauss has enumerated over twenty Graeco-Roman deities whose votives or statuettes have been found in mithraea (Clauss 2001, 158).

The example from the Mithraic tradition gives historical support to Apuleius' fictive construction and confirms an observation about syncretic formations that I suggested over twenty-five years ago with reference to it, namely, that syncretic representations, in addition to involving identifications and correspondences, are examples of selection and rejection. So, while ten of the eleven goddesses included by Apuleius in his novel were identified with Isis, one, the Syrian Goddess Atargatis, was not, despite her being identified with Isis elsewhere in historical contexts (Martin 1983, 139; Vanderlip 1972, 28, n. 18). Whereas Apuleius' cri-

111 Carsten Colpe lists fifteen examples of authorial syncretism during the Hellenistic era (though he doesn't include Apuleius in his list): "certain Pythagoreans, astrologers, Orphics, Physikoi, the various compilers of the Hermetic corpus and the sibylline and Chaldean oracles, the theosophists, alchemists, Lukianos of Samasata, Aelius Aristides, Numenious of Apamea, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Sallust" (Colpe 1967, 14: 219).

teria of selection were those of authorial intent, the selective criteria of the Mithraic groups derive, for the most part, from local practice.

Without an explanation for what Pachis has called the "tactics of selection" (Pachis 2004, 173), historical understandings of syncretism seem, at best, to be descriptive redundancies rather than explanatory in any scientific sense. While such descriptions may be able accurately to track the historical elements of formation, they do not offer any explanation for why, *given the historical situation*, certain syncretic possibilities were realized while others never were. In other words, syncretic constructions can be identified and described historically but historical descriptions do not *explain* historical constructions.

Syncretism, explanation and cognition

In 1987, Carsten Colpe defined "syncretism" as "relations between complex wholes," which "can be any coherence of mental elements and of actions, representations, or objects related to these elements," or "relations between particular components" of these wholes (Colpe 1987, 14: 219). However, attempts to *explain* such relationships at the historical level, Colpe conceded, can only result in classifications or typologies based on sophistic attempts to formulate generalizations about the multiplicity of historical specificities in ways that still differentiate between them (Colpe 1987, 14: 219, 220). While much ink has been spilt developing such historical classifications and typologies in efforts to provide heuristic models for syncretic relations and formations, the results of these generalizing efforts often approach—or even exceed—the complexity of the particular historical formations being described. On the other hand, less attention has been paid to what I take to be central to Colpe's definition of syncretism, namely, the "mental elements" to which diverse historical "actions, representations, or objects" are related and by which they may be explained.

Since Colpe first proposed his definition, a new disciplinary area of the cognitive science of religion has emerged that might offer some insight into those mental elements that are universal to human nature and, because of that universality, might structure as well as constrain the multiple possibilities of historical realization, including those often regarded as syncretistic.[112]

112 Colpe's article on "Syncretism" for the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) was translated from the German. Although I don't have access to the German original, I suppose that "mental elements" is the translation of "*geistige…*" rather than "*kognitive* [*Elementen*]." The cognitive sciences and the influences of this interdisciplary field of study have, however, challenged the

The fundamental premise of this new discipline is that the mind is not a passive "blank-slate" upon which cultural influences and information might simply be inscribed, as most accounts of syncretism would seem to assume, but that the mental processing of such influences and information is both constructive as well as constrained (Tooby and Cosmides 2005, 6–7). Such cognitive explanations may well contribute a clarifying scientific perspective to historical processes of selection and representation.

a. Syncretism, cognitive linguistics and blending theory

One of the first cognitive theories to be applied to the study of cultural formations is derived from cognitive linguistic theory. The promise and problems with this approach have been well summarized in a recent study by historian of religion Edward Slingerland, who illustrates it from Confucian syncretic constructions by Mencius in fourth-century BCE China—though Slingerland employs the linguistic category of "conceptual blending" rather than that of "syncretism" (Slingerland 2008, 188–209).

The presupposition of cognitive linguistics is that "linguistic conventions... represent the surface manifestations of deeper, active, and largely unconscious *conceptual* structures" (Slingerland 2008, 169). This theoretical presupposition was first elaborated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 1999) in their analyses of metaphor construction, in which body-based conceptual schemas are the *source* domain that serve as "conceptual templates for our understanding of abstract, or less clearly structured" *target* domains (Slingerland 2008, 166–167).

Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002) have extended "cognitive metaphor theory to argue that *all* of human cognition—even literal and logical thought—involves the creation of mental spaces and mappings between them" (Slingerland 2008, 176). Thus, "many expressions that, at first glance, seem to involve simple source to target domain mappings in fact involve the blending of two or more spaces into a...third 'blended' space" (Slingerland 2008, 177). In such complex analyses, blended constructions may themselves be shown to be inputs for further blends (Slingerland 2008, 209). It would be possible, conse-

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traditional distinction between the *Geistes- and Naturwissenschaften* by proposing scientific explanations for the former.

Ten years prior to his inclusion of "mental elements" in his definition of syncretism, Colpe referred to problems with the "interpretation of human nature," though he referred to this "human nature" in political and economic terms (Colpe 1977: 173).

quently, to analyze Apuleius' theocrasy, for example, as a metaphorical construction, whereby discretely represented goddesses, who themselves are metaphorical blends of certain cosmic attributes—"mother of all things…governess of all the elements…chief of the powers divine…principal of them that dwell in heaven"—become "blended" into a single mental space represented by Isis—who, in turn, metaphorically represents for Apuleius a Neo-platonic conceptual space of idealistic monism (Apul. *Met*. 11. 5)—or something of the sort. Analysis of this metaphorical "blend" would involve, consequently, a tracing of the historically differing source attributes of the blended deities—respectively, creatrix, originator of agriculture, guarantor of human reproduction and propagation, relief from illness, etc. (Apul. *Met*. 11. 2), into the target metaphor of Isis, which, in turn, associates her, as the metaphorical "Queen of Heaven," with Apuleius' view of the cosmic foundations of and conditions for human existence.

Although the model of conceptual blending derives from and seems to be biased towards an analysis of *texts* (e. g., Lundhaug 2007; Slingerland 2008, 188 – 209), Slingerland argues that the theory "provides us with a general model for how we might represent and *trace* "novel motor programs, technological interfaces, and social institutions" in addition to the "*selective* recruitment and combination of schemas into novel conceptual structures" (Slingerland 2008, 181, emphasis added). I am unaware, however, of any study that has attempted to extend the model to domains other the textual. Nevertheless, the key word in Slingerland's presentation of the theory is "*trace*" and while the blended spaces of any historical formation, like of those of conceptual expressions, may well be tractable, such trackings, while descriptive of source materials that may have been employed, approach, as with the case of historical classifications and typologies, the complexity of the formations being described without offering any explanatory insight into the criteria for selection and rejection (e. g., Slingerland 2008, 190 – 191, 198, 201, 205). As Slingerland puts it, the problem remains of "how the target of a given metaphor serves to constrain possible source domains, as well as to determine what parts of those source domains become conceptually active in the metaphor" (Slingerland 2008, 174). This is precisely the question that continues to confound historical explanations —or even descriptions—of syncretic formations, namely, the problem of what constraints are present in the construction of such formations and what criteria for selection are operative among the various syncretic possibilities afforded by conditions of historical complexity.

Slingerland concludes his discussion by alluding to a cognitive explanation for selective blending. "Cultural transmission," he writes, with reference to the work of Pascal Boyer (1994, 2001), "is a *selective process*, where a large and powerful suite of innate human cognitive biases assure that certain mental represen-

tations are more likely to be entertained and transmitted than others" (Slingerland 2008, 214, emphasis added). This "large and powerful suite of innate human cognitive biases," when fully mapped, can provide a greater explanatory basis for the mental elements underlying historical representations by human agents, past as well as present, than that offered by intricate descriptive tracings of those constructions.

b. Syncretism, epidemiological transmission and stabilization

In the view of the cognitive anthropologists Pascal Boyer and Dan Sperber, our "individual brains are each inhabited by a large number of ideas that determine our behavior." Since some, but not all, of these ideas spread from mind to mind, they are inevitably transformed, as in the children's game of "Telephone." Only those representations which are...*minimally* transformed" will end up being publically shared and "belonging to culture" (Sperber 1996, 83). In a question directly related to that of syncretic formations, Sperber asks: "what causes such [public] representations to appear, to expand, to split, to merge with one another, to change over time, to die" (Sperber 1996, 83)?

Since any mental representation spreads from mind to mind, Sperber employs an "epidemiological" approach for understanding their spread and stabilization. That information which is most successfully transmitted, he argues, is that which is intuitively attracted to evolved cognitive domains of individual minds whereas that information which is domain impoverished will be transmitted poorly, if at all. As Sperber puts it, these cognitive "adaptations to an ancestral environment...tend to fix a lot of cultural content in and around [these specialized] cognitive domains" (Sperber 1996, 113; see Sperber and Hirschfeld 2004), both within populations as well as across generations (Claidière and Sperber 2007, 91). Such evolutionary and cognitive defaults are increasingly being recognized by literary critics as accounting for recurring themes in literature (e. g., Gottschall and Wilson 2005; Flesch 2008) and by historians as establishing the purduring concerns of historical agents (e. g., Guthrie 2005; Hanlon 2007).

The primary cognitive attractor or domain represented by the deities identified or associated by both Apuleius and Decimus is that of "agency." "Agents," readily distinguished from inanimate objects already by infants, are self-motivating, intentional objects in the world which carry with them certain expectations of action and accomplishment; deities are agents that are considered to accomplish the results attributed them by extraordinary means. Agents identified with one another, therefore, are those considered, whether by authorial intent or by local practice, to share a domain relevant quality or function. Consequently,

the deities identified by Apuleius in his novel are an empathetic assemblage of goddesses who represent possibilities for the realization of good fortune (*agathe tychē*) in a systemic antipathy to the ill fortune that was considered to plague Graeco-Roman existence (Martin 1987). Atargatis is excluded from this assembly because of her association—but only in Apuleius's tale—with this cosmic fortuitousness (Martin 1983, 139). The deities associated with Mithras by Decimus—and by others—were based on their common relationship to the sun (Apollo, Sol, and Helios), on their mutual roles as psychopomps (Mercury or Hermes) (Clauss 2001, 158), or on their associations with the military (Jupiter Dolechenus). But, whereas Apuleius' enumeration of selectively identified deities was all goddesses, Decimus' list was bisexual, necessitating the explication of yet another cognitive principle. Since deities are agents considered to accomplish the results attributed them by extraordinary means, they are also typically represented as powerful. Decimus' association of Mithras, and of the other deities he lists, with Jove, Juno and Minerva—the Roman Capitoline Triad—associated the power of these deities with that of the state, exploiting, thereby, a cognitive bias in support of imperial supremacy.[113]

Sperber's metaphor of epidemiological transmission of public representations suggests that some minds might exhibit either an innate or, more likely, an acquired *immunity* to "cultural infections" (Martin 2004; Sørensen 2004). In the more or less expected syncretic associations of certain Graeco-Roman deities with Mithras in the cultural heterogeneity of the Roman Empire, the remarkably faithful transmission of the central Mithraic tauroctony is a case in point. This rather complex image invariably portrays the Roman god

> Mithras pinning a fallen bull with his left knee. With his face averted to his right, he pulls the animal's head back by its mouth, chin, or horns with his left hand so that its throat is exposed; with his right hand, he slays the beast with his knife or sword. A sheaf of grain sprouts from the bull's tail. A raven appears over Mithras's right shoulder, often perched on his cloak. A serpent and often a cup are ranged beneath the bull, while a dog laps at the fatal wound of the bull and a scorpion is attached to the dying animal's genitals (Martin 1987, 115).

Such a complex composition would seem to be vulnerable, if not outright amenable, to syncretic alteration. And yet this image was transmitted throughout the Roman Empire, to its farthest boundaries, with little to no variation. The faithful transmission of the tauroctonous image is even more remarkable when we con-

113 Reinhold Merkelbach understands Mithraism to be a "*Religion der Loyalität im römischen Kaiserreich*" (Merkelbach 1984, 153–88).

sider that there is no evidence that any Mithraist ever proposed *even the idea* of some centralized conceptual control or administration that might support its standardization; that there is no evidence for the existence of any Mithraic texts or artistic templates that might have provided instructions or models for the tauroctony; and that new Mithraic cells were often established by initiates, who were, nevertheless, often uneducated (Martin 2005, 2014).[114] Although these conclusions could reflect a taphonomic bias in which generalized conclusions are based solely upon fortuitously surviving data, comparative studies of contemporaneous religious groups, including the early Christianities, argues for Mithraic exceptionalism on these evidential points. The theoretical question raised by our historical example of Mithraism, then, is how this rather complex image became immunized to syncretic influences in the context of a cult that seemed otherwise receptive to a multitude of such influences? Interestingly, *resistance* to external influences, like their *reception*, seems to exploit innate cognitive attractors as well.

In its Roman context, the Mithraic tauroctony could only have been viewed by non-initiate members of the public as a representation of sacrifice (Martin 1994, 2009), a feature of much Roman official religion (Beard *et al*. 1998, 36; Turcan 2000, 103) that would have provided a particularly salient and inferentially rich image for Roman minds. A plausible cognitive attractor evoked by sacrificial rites is an evolved sense of reciprocity—observable even among our cousin primates (Burkert 1996, 129–155; Brosnan and de Waal 2003; de Waal 1989; 1997). As expressed in the seemingly universal formula of relationship with deity—*do ut des* (Burkert 1996, 130, 136–138; van der Leeuw 1920/21; Durkheim 1915, 388)—this ritual might be expected to activate default expectations about an economy of exchange (e.g., van der Leeuw 1920/21), a principle that is manifest either as an actual exchange of resources among participants or as a potential exchange with invisible partners (Boyer 2001, 242; Atran 2002, 115). Mnemonically enhanced by the predictable visceral reaction and emotional salience universally evoked by the spilling of blood (Burkert 1996, 30), this principle, in the more traditional formulation by the classicist Walter Burkert, "celebrates the commensality of men in the presence of the sacred" (Burkert 1996, 150).

The Mithraic tauroctony has also been identified as a star-map, in which each of its compositional elements corresponds to well-known constellations: the bull to taurus, the dog to canis minor, the serpent to hydra, the scorpion

114 For example, four members of Septimius Severus' Praetorian Guard were deployed, at the beginning of the third century AD, to Palaiopolis, on the island of Andros, where they dedicated a mithraeum (*CIMRM* 2350). The faulty grammar of their dedicatory inscription betrays the "semi-literate" character of its inscribers (Reed 1975, 207).

to scorpio, the cup, when present, to krater, and the wheat emerging from the tail of the bull, to the star spica (Ulansey 1989; Beck 1984; 2006). This cosmic organization of the tauroctony would have been especially attractive to the visuospatial skills that are predominant among males (Kimura 1999, 43–66; Sherry 2000), who, of course, exclusively constituted the membership of the Mithraisms. This attraction to a spatial organization of relationships together with a corollary motor adaptation had an evolutionary history in such ancestral male pursuits as hunting (see e.g., Kimura 1999, 31–41; Guthrie 2005, 228–240, 257–265)—judging the position of moving targets, for example (Law et al. 1993), and accurately aiming projectiles at them (Baron-Cohen 2003, 79–80; Ecuyer-Dab and Robert 2004; Lawton and Hatcher 2005, 722; Holmes 2008, 39–40)—activities of significance for the large number of Mithraic initiates who were also members of the military, for which the cult had a special attraction (Clauss 2001, 36) and through which the cult was largely spread (Clauss 2001, 21–22). Finally, in contrast to empathizing, which is statistically a characteristic of "female brains," the methodical patterns of astrological configurations would have been attractive to the systemizing proclivity of male brains (Baron-Cohen 2003). This systemization bias would have provided mnemonic support for faithful transmission of the Mithraic tauroctony by its male membership.

The cognitive effort required to so faithfully transmit the Mithraic taurctony attests to the central importance of this image for the social identity of the distributed Mithraic groups (Martin 2009). Consequently, any discussion of selection among historically available ideas, representations or practices, or of immunization against such availability, must also include an explanation for how local ideas and preferences, while stabilized by cognitive attractors, are processed and differentiated by evolved neuron-cognitive functions.[115]

c. The neural implementation of syncretistic selection

One universal cognitive function, whereby historically antecedent and culturally contingent elements of syncretic formations are processed, is imitation. *Homo sapiens* are innately imitators, and we are so within minutes of our birth. Within the first hour of life, infants instinctively imitate rudimentary manual and facial gestures (Meltzoff and Moore 1977). Like most animals, it's how we learn (Iaco-

115 Daniel Lord Smail has presented a fascinating and compelling argument that practices influence human behavior by altering brain chemistry (Smail 2008; Martin, Chapter 18 this volume). D. C. A. Hillman has made a similar argument for the Graeco-Roman world generally (Hillman 2008).

boni 2008, 38–42), how we continue to learn as adults and how we transmit what we have learned (Iacoboni 2008, 215–217; 260).

The cognitive anthropologist Thomas Wynn has noted that "[a]ll understandings of the nature of mind have begun to take account of developments in neuroscience" (Wynn 2009, 146) and a possible neurological basis for the compulsion to imitate—and for learned constraints upon this function—is the recent discovery of "mirror neurons" in the brains of primates, now confirmed in those of humans as well. While the significance of this discovery is contested by some neuroscientists (e.g., "Commentary" on Hurley 2008, 22–52), it has been hailed by others as the single most important discovery of the decade (e.g., Ramachandran, n.d., 1, 6).

Briefly, mirror neurons are a specialized kind of motor neuron located primarily in areas of the premotor and inferior parietal cortexes. These neurons not only fire when an individual performs a particular action but also when that individual observes that act, or even when that individual speaks or hears about it (Iacoboni 2008, 12)—and, they account for "automatic" arousal and behavioral responses to these inputs (Motluk 2008). The firings of these neurons are linked to functions of the limbic system, the neural system which is associated with emotions (Iacoboni 2008, 112, 115–116). Consequently, these specialized neurons facilitate our feelings of empathy (Iacoboni 2008, 116–121) and may contribute to an explanation for human sociality generally (Iacoboni 2008, 30). Further, they support and, more importantly, give analytical clarity to and explanation for descriptions by cognitive linguists and conceptual blending theorists of those conceptual schemas that are derived from the body and its perceptual and motor experiences, and that serve as the source domain for blended constructions (Iacoboni 2008, 92).

On the other hand, neither animals nor humans go through their lives constantly imitating all of the observed actions of other members of their species. To do so would simply be an inefficient way for any species to have evolved an ability to learn (Iacoboni 2008, 200). Rather, the neural implementation of imitation, like processes of syncretic formations, are constrained, and therefore selective. This process of selectivity seems to be controlled at the neural level by a second type of cell in the mirror neuron system that inhibits and modulates the simpler mirror neurons. Because of its controlling function, this second type of neuron has been termed a "super mirror neuron" (Iacoboni 2008, 202). Super mirror neurons are differentiated from simple mirror neurons by their firing rate. While both simple and super mirror neurons fire when an individual performs some action, super mirror neurons fire at a decreased rate when an individual simply observes an action, or they cease to fire altogether (Iacoboni 2008, 202–203, 265). With their differential rate of firing, these super mirror neurons may be inhibiting

the imitative compulsion occasioned by the uninterrupted firing of the simple mirror neurons (Iacoboni 2008, 203, 225–226).

While the simple mirror neuron system is linked to the automatic functions of the limbic system, the super mirror neuron system is located in the mesial frontal cortex areas of the brain that are associated with such reflective mental functions as reasoning, planning, organization, emotional and impulse control, problem solving, as well as with learning and memory (Iacoboni 2008, 195–199). This area of the brain is the least developed in infancy but shows dramatic developmental and experiential change (Iacoboni 2008, 203). These developmental changes include an encoding of transmitted, stabilized, experienced and learned social preferences in the neural systems of the frontal lobe. In other words, the super mirror neurons function to constrain imitative behavior in accordance with social preferences transmitted in the context of localized practices—as in the Mithraic cells (Iacoboni 2008, 271).

Whereas humans are hard-wired, as it were, to learn through imitation, resulting in, for example, such theocrasic representations as those by Apuleius and Decimus, we are also hard-wired to select which aspects of others we finally imitate on the basis of locally determined preferences and behaviors,[116] and consequently which to reject. In other words, our brains function naturally to make sense of our environments and to articulate and to transmit that sense conceptually by efficiently organizing that sense in ways that blend information into categories deemed both socially as well as cognitively relevant—whether that synchrony is reflexive or reflective (Lieberman et al. 2002).[117] At this level of neurological implementation, it would seem that the species *Homo sapiens* simply is *H. imitatus*, that is to say, *H. syncretismus*. From this neurological perspective, therefore, a generalized history of religions or social scientific category of "syncretism" would seem simply to be a redundant truism. As Robert Baird famously argued already in 1971 with respect to analyses of syncretism at the historical level, "no real purpose is served by applying" this term to describe a process that is "both inevitable and universal" (Baird 1971, 146).

116 Marco Iacoboni and his colleagues have argued that this differential coding for actions of self (increased firing rate) and that of others (decreased firing rate) "may represent a wonderfully simple neural distinction between self and others" (Iacoboni 2008, 203), which has elsewhere been described by existential phenomenologists (Iacoboni 2008, 259–272).

117 The psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman have identified a cognitive bias whereby humans in uncertain or complex situations reflexively (or intuitively) make judgments about similarities by reflexively (intuitively) judging how likely it is that A belongs to category B by asking themselves how similar A is to their prior image or stereotype of B (Tversky and Kahnemann 1974, 1124).

Conclusion

Processes of globalization, that is, modifications to local, community and traditional identities resulting from cultural contact, past and present, may be the occasion for syncretism but they do not explain syncretism—nor do they explain historical instances of identity maintenance by resistance to cultural influence in the face of such contact. Descriptions, from our historical example of identifications of the Roman god Mithras with other "congenial" Graeco-Roman deities or of their perceived correspondences, explain nothing about the nature of that congeniality among the particular deities in particular times and places or about unexpected and idiosyncratic juxtapositions, for example, the presence of an Amor-Psyche relief in the Mithraeum of Capua Vetere (*CIMRM* 186; Martin 2009). And while representations of Mithras were contaminated by those of contemporaneous Graeco-Roman deities, the particularly faithful transmission of the Mithraic tauroctonous image throughout the broad expanse of empire presents a confound for historical generalizations about processes of cultural interaction.

The category "syncretism" is not employed, for example, by historians of food to characterize the mutual influence of various ethnic foods or types of preparation upon one another (e. g., the now chic cuisine known as "fusion") or by linguistic historians to characterize the mutual influence of languages upon one another (e. g., creolization). Rather the notion of "syncretism" seems to be a notion employed predominantly by historians of religion to characterize an ordinary historical dynamic that, nevertheless, still retains a normative sense from its earlier theological usage (e. g., Kraemer 1956), implying, by semantic suggestion, some "non-syncretic" ahistorical alternative, e. g., revelation.

Ironically, the generalized history of religions category "syncretism" seems to have functioned to *explain away* the particulars of religio-historical change. Nevertheless, research at the neuro-cognitive level has begun to offer explanations for those "mental elements" that Colpe understood as central to such historical processes and relations. These mental elements include conscious as well as non-conscious capacities for, as well as constraints upon, processes of selecting and rejecting cultural and historical possibilities by historical agents, how the practices and mental representations of these agents were generated and transmitted, and how they became transformed and re-represented in their transmission from mind to mind and from group to group. We can summarize these contributions as follows:

1. An explanation of so-called "syncretisms" involves two cognitive processes: blending (identification, correspondence) and selection (or rejection). Some "syncretistic" representations that are historically and culturally possible occur, others do not; some of those that do occur spread epidemiologically, oth-

ers do not. A cognitive process may be considered to be the specific sequence of events required to structure the type of knowledge or representation under consideration (Maestro and Collina 2009, 88).

Blending and selection are, of course, ordinary cognitive processes whereby *H. sapiens* categorize and thereby make sense of their environments. The psychologist Sarnoff Mednick considered "the forming of associative elements into new combinations which either meet specified requirements or are in some way useful" to define the "nature of creative thinking" (Mednick 1962, 221). "Categorization," then, is a fundamental cognitive process of creative and selective grouping by which some "distinct entities are treated as equivalent" but others are not. As with syncretistic formations, the question remains "why we have the categories we have and not others" (Medin and Aguilar 1999, 104; with respect to syncretism, see Martin 1983, 139).

2. Any historical change and stabilization involves both endogenous factors of blending and selection, such as evolved default cognitive attractors and the neurologically implemented proclivity for imitation, as well as learned exogenous factors of selection, which inhibit or constrain endogenous default biases.

3. It might prove heuristically beneficial to employ another, more neutral category for those historical constructions that have been described as "syncretistic." Such a category must, however, reflect that such historical constructions are not cultural stases to be described but represent cognitive processes by human minds, whereby blended representations themselves become inputs to be rejected, to be incorporated into held representations, or to be immunized against inputs and stabilized. These processes must be explained.

Contributions to the study of religion from the cognitive sciences that map processes of endogenous selection and the neuron-cognitive mechanisms whereby exogenous factors become processed promise to restore to that study Max Müller's prescient, if subsequently neglected, proposal to establish a *naturwissenschaftliche* foundation for historical as well as contemporary studies of religion (Müller 1881 [1867], 1893 [1870]; Wiebe 1984, 1995).

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17. What Do Rituals Do (and How Do They Do It)? Cognition and the Study of Ritual

> In explanations of culture, the uninvited guest, who is always pointedly avoided, is the human mind.
>
> —Claude Lévi-Strauss

In *To Take Place* (1987), Jonathan Z. Smith begins his consideration of "theory *in* [not *of*] ritual" with reference to a citation by Claude Lévi-Strauss of a certain "native thinker" who had commented that "[a]ll sacred things must have their place." Smith also cites Lévi-Strauss' comment on this citation, "that being in their place is what makes...[things] sacred" (Smith 1987, *xii*; Lévi-Strauss 1966, 10). In his note to this passage, Smith acknowledges that Lévi-Strauss' source for the "native thinker," Alice Fletcher's ethnography of the Pawnee Hako Ceremony (Fletcher 1904, 34), has a "somewhat different implication" than what Lévi-Strauss had concluded. Rather than "being in place which confers sacrality," as Lévi-Strauss would have it, "it is the ritualist who sets apart a place for the sacred" (Smith 198, 121, n. 2; see also Smith 1970, 282, n. 6). In the words of the "native thinker," Tahiroossawichi,[118] a Ku'rahus or Pawnee elder and ritual leader who was Fletcher's informant (Fletcher 1904, 14–15), "[*t*]*he first act of a man must be to set apart a place that can be made sacred and holy*..., a place where a man can put his sacred articles" (Smith 1987, 121, n 2; Fletcher 1904, 33, *emphasis added*).[119] Tahiroossawichi continued to explain that "before a man can build [such] a dwelling he must select a spot and *make it* sacred" (Fletcher 1904, 33, *emphasis added*). Significantly, the explanation by Tahiroossawichi emphasizing the role of the ritualist in establishing sacred place precedes—and thus frames—his comment cited by Lévi-Strauss. Smith nevertheless prefers Lévi-Strauss' gloss as "extremely provocative on the level of theory" (Smith 1987, 122, n. 2) and premised upon this ethnographic ambiguity Smith develops his view that whereas "[r]itual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention," it is "place [that] directs attention" (Smith 1987, 103). Smith illustrates his view ethnographically, with a redescription of the understanding of place among the Tjilpa aborigines

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118 Tahiroossawichi is transcribed by Fletcher as "Tahir[unknown]ussawichi" in which "[unknown]u" is equivalent to "oo" as in "good" (Fletcher 1904, 16).

119 Lévi-Strauss' conclusion that were things "taken out of their place...the entire universe would be destroyed" (Smith 1987, *xii*; Lévi-Strauss 1966, 10) is also somewhat hyperbolical since Tahiroossawichi, in his explanation, was referring to the sanctification of an *Akaru* or dwelling place—though it must be acknowledged that the *Akaru* lodge characteristically had a dome-shaped roof analogous to the meeting of the sky with the earth (Fletcher 1904, 33).

of Australia, as well as historically, with reference to the understanding of place traditionally associated with the Jewish Temple and the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—introducing, thereby, his continuing theoretical concern with the enterprise of comparison (Smith 1987, 12–13; 34–35; Smith 1982, 19–35).

Smith's emphasis upon the comparative value of place neglects, however, *how* ritual and place do what he claims for them for their ritual subjects—in the case of the Pawnee Hako Ceremony, the children of the tribe (Fletcher 1904, 26a)—even if these effects are only "in [their] thought," as Lévi-Strauss characteristically emended (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 10; Gardner 1981, 133).

Lévi-Strauss famously argued that cultures are the products of, and consequently reflect, the structures of the human mind (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 104; Leach 1974, 2, 22), that "uninvited" but inevitable guest at "explanations of culture" (Gardner 1981, 133). These mental structures are, he argued, based in turn on those of the brain rather than upon any "inert product of the action of the environment upon an amorphous consciousness" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 90; 1969, 75; Leach 1974, 54, 59; Gardner 1981, 133, 161). Rather, Lévi-Strauss writes,

> one must seek the "unconscious categories" [of the native thinker] which, as [Marcel] Mauss wrote in one of his first works, are determinants "in magic, as in religion, as in linguistics"...[T]his analysis in depth was to enable Mauss to reestablish ties with other sciences of man that had at times been unwisely severed: with history, since the ethnographer sets up camp in the particular, and also with biology and psychology, once social phenomena are recognized as being "first social, but also, and at the same time, both physiological and psychological" (Lévi-Strauss 1976, 7; Mauss 1950, 111, 299).[120]

However, in contrast to the physiological and psychological structures of the brain, which were just then beginning to be explored (Leach 1974, 23), Lévi-Strauss attempted to deduce mental structures from their culture expressions, especially from myths, that mode of expression which he considered to operate with the fewest cultural restraints (Gardner 1981, 133).

More recently, neuro- and cognitive scientists have been seeking to map the fundamental structures of the human brain itself and how these structures function in the formation of mental representations as well as cultural expressions. These scientists, focusing primarily upon universally evolved mechanisms for

120 Mauss' reference to "unconscious categories" seems to refer to what is now termed the "cognitive unconscious" rather than to psychoanalytic usage in reference to repressed memories. "Cognitive unconscious" refers, rather, to the myriad non-conscious functions of the brain, from the regulation of heart rate to, as for Mauss, the generation of and attention to language (see e.g., LeDoux 2002, 11–12).

the individual production and transmission of mental representations, have recognized but generally paid less attention to the ways by which natural processes of cognition also operate to impose a degree of stability on particular configurations of mental representations.

As Mauss already recognized, anthropologists and historians have emphasized the particularity of historical formations while neglecting—even rejecting—the growing bodies of evidence that establish universal functions of the human brain as themselves among the constraining variables for these formations. It is, on the other hand, certain cognitive mechanisms, such as the functions of memory in the retention of socially rehearsed scripts and schematas,[121] which tend to fix traditions in their ethnographic and historical particularity (Sperber 1996). In the following, I should like to suggest some possibilities of bio-cognitive theorizing for the historical study of ritual that might restore the ties between anthropology, history, biology, and psychology whose dissolution was so lamented by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss—a project now being contemplated also by Smith (Smith 2004, xi).

i

> Who were we? What have we become? Where were we? Where have we been placed? To what place are we going? From what place have we been released?
> —Clement of Alexandria

> [I]n order to find good things and avoid bad ones, you have to know where you are, where you need to go, how to navigate from where you are to where you need to go, and what sorts of stimuli along the way will be useful in guiding you.
> —Joseph LeDoux

In the words of Tahiroossawichi, Lévi-Strauss' "native thinker," "[t]he *first act* of a man must be to set apart a place that can be made sacred and holy" (Fletcher 1904, 2: 34, *emphasis added*). This search for a sacred, i. e., "good," place seems to have been a universal human quest from antiquity (e. g., Clem. *Exc. Thdot*. 78.2) to modernity, "[i]n order," according to the neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, "to avoid bad ones" (LeDoux 2002, 251). The representation of such places is one of the few cognitive functions for which neuroscientists have established both a neural substrate and a correlate behavior.

121 "Script" is a term generally used by cognitive scientists to designate cognitive templates for sequences of action; "Schema" is a generic term for cognitive templates that is sometimes used to designate conceptual in contrast to action templates (Brewer 1999, 720).

In the 1970s, it was discovered that certain subsets of pyramidal cells in the hippocampus fire action potentials only when a subject moves into a particular location while others fire when it moves to a different place (Kandel 2006, 309). As this discovery of "place cells" is summarized by the Nobel Prize winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel, "[t]he brain breaks down its surroundings into many small, over-lapping areas, similar to a mosaic, each represented by activity in specific cells in the hippocampus" (Kandel 2006, 309). Recent research has also implicated parahippocampal cortices in a modularly organized network for spatial representation and navigation (Leutgeb *et al.* 2005). Consequently, anytime a subject enters a particular place, that place is recalled (Kandel 2006, 310). LeDoux even concluded that the hippocampus might be the neural "place for space" (LeDoux 2002, 113).

Subsequently, it was discovered that certain subsets of "head direction cells" in the postsubiculum, an area of the brain closely related to the hippocampus, fire action potentials only when a subject faces in a particular direction (Taube *et al.* 1990; Sharp 1999, 26). Like place cells, head direction cells have been detected in anatomically related regions of the brain other than that of their initial discovery (Sharp 1999; Leutgeb *et al.* 2005).

The navigational function of both place and head direction cells is based upon landmarking, in which knowledge of the agent's immediate surroundings establishes place-specific firing patterns, and upon "dead-reckoning," the innate ability to keep track of current position and directional heading as an agent moves through space. This latter ability has been documented ethnographically for *Homo sapiens*, especially with reference to the expertise of native Micronesian islanders navigating open water (Pick 1999b, 381; see Hutchins 1995, 65–93), and experimentally by confirming predictions based on animal testing with blind or blindfolded human subjects (Pick 1999a). When landmarks are experimentally removed, absolute or "dead-reckoning" abilities are still documented (Sharp 1999, 26). This "cognitive mapping"—the term was introduced to describe behavior observed by the psychologist Edward Tolman already in 1948 (Pick 1999a)—normally employs both of these abilities and plays a central role in our spatial cognition (Kandel 2006, 282).

In their groundbreaking study of *The Hippocampus as a Cognitive Map* (1978), John O'Keefe and Lynn Nadel concluded that "[a] unitary spatial framework, considered essential to the interpretation of a wide variety of abilities, seems to be present innately and available to organisms of numerous species [including *Homo sapiens*] as soon as they can move" (O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 55). The evolutionary background for this cognitive ability is clear. When an agent traverses an indirect, even random, path over large areas in search of food, water, mates, it must—and, indeed, is generally able to—return directly to its

home place, its refuge from climatic and predatory hazard (Silverman and Choi 2005; Sharp 1999, 26; Pick 1999a, 135; Appleton 1996, 62–63; on humanistic views of "home," see Smith 1987, 28–31). Taking place is, in other words, a natural panhuman behavior encoded by natural selection into the neural functioning of human brains.

ii

> Each species [of birds] selects its ancestral habitat, instinctively recognizing it by the conspicuous, not necessarily the essential features.
> —David Lack

> [The setting apart of places] that can be made sacred and holy [must be] in accordance with the rites given to our fathers.
> —Tahiroossawichi

Whereas the "*general* capability for forming spatial maps is built into mind," Kandel has emphasized that "the *particular* map is not" (Kandel 2006, 309). Smith has argued—correctly, in my opinion—that rituals are, "first and foremost, a mode of paying attention" (Smith 1987, 103) and, since we do not have a dedicated sensory organ for space (Kandel 2006, 308), paying attention is how particular places become identified and represented (Kandel 2006, 424; Lack 1933, 259; Tahiroossawichi [Fletcher 1904, 33]). In addition to representations of place based upon tacit self-motion signals (dead reckoning), attention, including the attention-directing character of ritual, focuses and coordinates extrinsic information, i.e., landmarking, a kind of learning process (Wilson 2000, 598; Kandel 2006, 308–309). Since this learning process can include verbal and imagistic as well as non-verbal information (O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 380–381, 390), "the relationship between items in a map need...[not] represent...inevitable 'real-world' spatial relationship[s]" (O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 383), but may represent virtual relationships as well (Pick 1999b, 381). Recalling Lévi-Strauss' comment concerning the significance of place "even in [a ritual subject's] thought" (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 10, *supra*), cognitive mapping represents the particular place "where the...[subject] *thinks* it is" (Kandel 2006, 309). The location system of humans provides, in other words, "optional strategies for placing items in the map, manipulating those that are already there, and relating different segments of the map to each other" (O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 385). Ritual, we may conclude, is one such strategy, which exploits evolutionary patterns of cognitive mapping by placing virtual items in a particularized place, manipulating those that are already there, and relating these and different segments of the map—

virtual and actual—one to another, in order to produce an experience of safe place.

iii

> [E]xperience is a complex notion with many possible meanings and endless implications.
> —Joseph LeDoux

> We now have entire industries that deliberately design and manufacture experience.
> —Merlin Donald

A subject's establishment of a specific place through landmark orientation as well as by dead reckoning is built up through quotidian experiences an agent has with any particular spatial layout (O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 50; Pick 1999a, 136). Particularized and particularizing modes of paying attention, such as ritual, function as a kind of "system interrupt" which violates, in some way, ordinary expectations associated with the undifferentiated stream of sensory input and which defines, most generally, "experience" (Donald 2001, 221). "[E]xperience [—in this differentiated sense of *an* experience—] has drifted very far from the natural streams of events that we imagine to be the normal source of experience" (Donald 2001, 316). As explained already by Aristotle, such everyday, undifferentiated experience (sense perception) is neither generalizable nor articulable (Arist. *An. Post.* 2. 19. 100a); rather, it would be, as the developmental psychologist Annette Karmiloff-Smith has concluded, "simply added, domain specifically, to the existing stock" of stored knowledge, if any, and would have minimal effect on previously encoded knowledge (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 18).

Karmiloff-Smith has proposed a model whereby the mind internally exploits such experiential (sensory) input through a staged process of re-representation (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 707).[122] The introduction of selected stimuli would exploit innate cognitive potentials (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 5–6, 11–12, 18; 1994, 700) in ways that shift focus from experiential input to *an* experience, that is, to a system-internal dynamics in which knowledge is represented consciously in terms of a set of innately specified predispositions (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 6, 19; 1994, 695, 700). In this phase of re-representation, initial representations, according to Karmiloff-Smith, become "reduced" in a way that they lose many of the details of the procedurally encoded information, becoming, thereby, simpler and less

122 Karmiloff-Smith's model (Karmiloff-Smith, 1992; 1994) describes novel learning among adults as well as developmentally for children (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 18, 26–27; 1994, 694, 705).

specialized but more cognitively flexible (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 21; 1994, 700). Rituals can provide the attentional clues that can differentiate *an* experience from the flood of input and can structure that experience in controlled ways (Donald 2001, 245).

The most often noted ritual technique for focusing attention is repetition (Bell 1992, 91–92), a characteristic of ritual that has been emphasized by religious scholars at least since the beginning of the last century when Freud considered the relationship between ritual and "obsessive neurosis" (Freud 1959 [1907], cited also by Smith 1987, 100–111), an uncontrolled characteristic of repetition (Boyer and Liénard 2006). Controlled repetition is, of course, the timeless pedagogical technique for formal instruction. Less recognized are those rituals in which the ritual subject participates only once, at least in the same role, or at most, infrequently. Such rituals are characterized by somatic assault and emotional arousal (Whitehouse 2000, 21–33; McCauley-Lawson 2002, 77–85; Martin 2005b), which, uncontrolled, might also result in pathological rather than adaptive consequences, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, certain kinds of phobias, flashbacks, etc. (Hogan 2003, 175–176). Controlled "rites of terror," on the other hand (Whitehouse 2000, 21–33), can prompt an implicit form of learning by the participant on the basis of priming (learned or socialized suggestion),[123] as, for example, is the case with the cunning or shrewdness associated with cult initiation rites or urban "street smarts."

The somatic and perceptual novelties of ritualized focus, controlled and uncontrolled, are often considered by ritual subjects to be *extraordinary.* Extraordinary experiences especially stimulate the brain to become generally more active and focus attention by organizing the brain around task-related projects for a significant period of time (Donald 2001, 177; Hogan 2003, 9). Such extraordinary experiences *may* be interpreted as *religious.* Such interpretations require, however, that these "religious" experiences be *structured* as such (Donald 2001, 245), and this structuring process not only requires attentional cues and focus but an explicit formulation of knowledge as religious.

In a final phase of redescription, experiential input is reformulated, according to Karmiloff-Smith, "into a cross-system code…[that is] close enough to natural language for easy translation into stable, communicable form" (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 23). Once this cognitive process of "redescription has taken place and explicit representations become manipulable," "violations" could be intro-

123 "Priming" is a term employed by cognitive scientists to refer to "the [mnemonic] ability to identify or produce an item…as a result of a specific prior encounter with the item" (Buckner 2000, 822; Schacter and Curran 2000, 830); it makes such items ready for access (Hogan 2003, 18).

duced into "data-driven, veridical descriptions of the world" (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 22; 1994, 701). Such violations might include those that produce the counterintuitive claims and representations of superhuman agency that are generally characteristic of religious discourse (Boyer 2001, 59 – 91). As such, this now transpicuous knowledge can serve as sources of instruction, as guides, or as restraints (Rawson 1998, 110).

I should like to argue, therefore, that (religious) ritual, as "a mode of paying attention" not only establishes (virtual/sacred) places but induces in the ritual subject, as well, (religious) experiences that are explicitly structured by religious knowledge to be located in that space. Even as "[r]itual is not," for Smith, "an expression of or a response to 'the Sacred'" (Smith 1987, 105), so ritual is not an expression of or a response to some sort of religious experience. Rather, religious experience is the product of religious ritual. The claim that religious experience is the basis for religious practices, ideas and institutions is grounded more in theological (Protestant) bias than in historical evidence or cognitive process (Martin 2005b, McCutcheon 2005, 4 – 8). It would seem, as the cognitive psychologist Merlin Donald has noted (2001, 316), that it is religious institutions, among others, that produce those experiences, especially with their ritual strategies, which can be interpreted by ritual subjects as "religious." Nor is the production of such experiences considered to be an end in itself. Rather, they typically accomplish the self-interested goals of the manufacturing institution through their exploitation of tacit cognitive processes.

"Taking place," then, not only depends upon a tacit cognitive mapping of space; it involves as well the extrinsic introduction of information, which may include ritually transmitted virtual (religious) signals. Since this mapping ability involves the prior experiences of the agent (or ritual subject) in seeking to navigate its space, it depends additionally upon memory (M. A. Wilson 2000, 598; Tulving 2000, 727), as Tahiroossawichi emphasized, upon those particularizing "rites given to our fathers" (Fletcher 1904, 33).

iv

> For my own part even the sight of our senate-house at home...used to call up to me thoughts of Scipio, Cato, Laelius, and chief of all, my grandfather; such powers of suggestion do places possess. No wonder the scientific training of the memory is based upon locality.
> —Cicero

> Memory is the capacity of nervous systems to benefit from experience.
> —Endel Tulving

Smith observes that memory is "a complex and deceptive experience" that is "as much an affair of the present" as it is of the past, "as much an affair of space" as of time (Smith 1987, 25). There is, however, one form of memory, usually termed "episodic," that alone is oriented decidedly towards both past and place (In addition to Cicero's reference to the power of locating memories in place [*Fin.* 5.1.2], see on this classic mnemonic strategy Yates 1966; Luria 1987; Small 1997). Episodic recall involves thinking "back" to the time and place of earlier experiences; it "allows remembering of previous experiences as experienced" (Tulving 1999, 278). In contrast to "semantic" recall, or "memory for items independent of the time or place of their occurrence," O'Keefe and Nadel associate episodic memory, or recall for items or events within a spatio-temporal context, with the cognitive mapping functions of the hippocampus (O'Keefe and Nadel 1978, 381 and note; Tulving 1972; 1999; 2000). Although research on hippocampal place cells initially focused on their role in cognitive mapping, it is now recognized that these cells are also involved in episodic or context-specific memory (Leutgeb *et al.* 2005). Recent studies have shown that the hippocampus, and perhaps the parahippocampal cortex, are involved in the semantic as well as in the episodic systems of memory (LeDoux 2002, 115), and PET (positron emission tomography) scans have also associated retrieval from episodic memory with neural activity in non-hippocampal regions of the brain (i. e., the right prefrontal cortex, medial parietal cortex and the left cerebellum) (Tulving 1999, 279).

The different systems of memory—or their external storage surrogates, e. g., material cultural artifacts, pictorial representations, archives, etc.—are sites for the encoding and retrieval of differential representations of knowledge. A syntactic or narrative representation of knowledge, for example, usually encoded in and recalled from semantic memory, is characteristic of the texts so favored by historians. However, many kinds of knowledge may be coded in ways that do not involve writing, in physical signs such as artifacts, buildings, representations, for example, and in behaviors such as ritual (Rawson 1998, 110; 107–109). The information contained in such knowledge is often represented paratactically rather than syntactically, relationally rather than linearly, or analogically rather than digitally (Bateson 1972, 372–374, 411–425; Barth 1975, 207–214; Barth 1987, 69–70, 75; Donald 1991, 337; Whitehouse 2000, 64–65, 88–91; Whitehouse 2004, 44–45, 100–104, 114–118).

Lévi-Strauss has argued that conceptual representations of knowledge differ throughout human cultures as a consequence of differential processes of classification that are based upon a human concern to enumerate properties of the observers' environment (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 1–10). Such enumerated representations of knowledge are generally represented as clusters of information that may be organized visually, independent of any grammar or phonography (Don-

ald 1991, 285–292). The historian Richard Gordon has argued that such "spatial organization[s] of material[s]" claim authority for the autonomy of paratactic or analogical representations (Gordon 1996, 199), which would most likely be encoded in episodic memory. And the psychologist Lera Boroditsky has argued that our temporal sense of sequentiality, requisite for narrative, only developed by analogy to our prior visual and tactile experiences of space (Boroditsky 2000). Relationships within space and analogies of place may, of course, be represented in or cued to texts even as texts may be paratactically constructed. It is the task of the scholar to be aware of and to differentiate between different possible representations of knowledge and not attempt to read all representations of knowledge as texts, as have many recent interpreters.

Recall of extraordinary experiences from episodic memory provides an occasion for "spontaneous exegetical reflections" by ritual subjects upon the context-specific if analogical representations of knowledge. Recall from the semantic memory of information that is independent of time and space provides an occasion for the development and widespread transmission of propositional knowledge or beliefs (Whitehouse 2000; 2004). These divergent modes of transmission tend to support place-oriented group solidarity among ritual subjects, in the case of the former, and anonymous, wide-spread communities, in the case of the latter (Whitehouse 2000; 2004)—a divergence that shares some features of Smith's description of world visions as locative or utopian (Smith 1987, 101).

Conclusion

> None of those...who were invited shall taste my banquet.
> —The Gospel of Luke

In *To Take Place*, Smith considers two types of data for the study of religion: ethnographic (the Tjilpa groups of Australian aborigines) and historical (Jewish and Christian sites in Jerusalem).[124] I have here proposed the value of considering, as well, a third type of data: the empirical findings of the bio-cognitive sciences. Such a triangulation of ethnography and historical data with those from explanatory approaches can reunify studies of religion into the kind of integrated theoretical and methodological framework envisaged by Mauss and subsequently advocated primarily by evolutionary psychologists (Cosmides *et al.* 1992; Tooby

124 As Smith emphasizes, it is, of course, the foremost responsibility of the scholar "to articulate clearly why 'this' rather than 'that' [datum] was chosen as an exemplum" of *religion* (Smith 1982, xi-xii).

and Cosmides 1992, 19–24; E. O. Wilson 1999). For these three approaches can both supplement one another while providing correctives to biases that might mark one or another approach alone.

Anthropologists and historians can apply cognitive theorizing to their data and assess their experimental predictions with specific examples (or counterexamples). They can also contribute a comparative dimension to the experimental designs and research agendas of the cognitive scientist and provide correctives to their often culturally ethnocentric assumptions. On the other hand, the findings of neuro- and cognitive scientists can provide anthropologists and historians evidence concerning cognitive capacities for and constraints upon both the production of their data and their own interpretations of that data.[125] Further, the common evolutionary, biological and cognitive foundations upon which cultural particularities are constructed and constrained, those of place for example, establish a panhuman rule whereby socio-historical difference—the grounds for interesting comparison for Smith (1987, 14) as for Lévi-Strauss (1963, 77)—may be measured (see Smith 1982, 21). These common human capacities abate, in other words, anti-comparative emphases upon ethnographic or historical uniqueness (Smith 1987, 34–35). I suggest, in other words, that those usually invited to the table of cultural explanations will never fully taste of that banquet 'til they fully welcome that usually uninvited, indeed, pointedly avoided, guest—the human mind.

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125 In a series of preliminary studies, I have attempted to illustrate the utility of cognitive theorizing for a history of religions with specific reference to those of the Graeco-Roman period, e. g., Martin 2003/2004; 2004a; 2004b; 2005a; 2005b; 2009a; 2009b.

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18. The Deep History of Religious Ritual

A historical approach to religious ritual recalls us from recent non-historically oriented fashions in academia to the European roots of our common endeavors in the academic study of religion, an endeavor that has been represented, from the late nineteenth century, as *Religionsgeschichte*. Increasingly, however, the history of religions became associated with an ahistorical approach in which "history" became a synonym for a phenomenographical corpus of truncated and decontextualized evidence, the temporality of which was disregarded in favor of claims to its being manifestations of a panhuman religious essentialism. This atemporal religious phenomenology commits, of course, the historiographical heresy of "presentism," a mode of analysis in which contemporary assumptions, ideas and perspectives are anachronistically introduced into depictions and interpretations of the past.[126] A subsequent postmodernist vogue in religious studies that placed its emphasis on the cultural significance of constructed particulars is, in practice, no less "presentist" than the phenomenological, for postmodernism has continued the beleaguered tradition of psychological behaviorism now writ large as a construction of mind upon blank-slated subjects by a hypostasized discursive present.

After several millennia during which mind was distinguished from matter and the former privileged over the latter, the Darwinian revolution fully situated the mind of *Homo sapiens* in nature, resolutely subjecting mind to brain function and establishing both as a consequence of our evolutionary history. Recent insights from the evolutionary history of *H. sapiens*, and from the cognitive sciences for which that history provides a frame, provides insights into the evolved capacities for and constraints upon the "ritualized behaviors" of *H. sapiens* (Boyer and Liénhard 2006) across the range of human history.

Ever since the ancient Greeks observed other peoples' behaviors and acknowledged that they might be studied and understood, attempts have been made to stipulate which, and even whether, certain ritualized behaviors might productively be predicated as "religious." Precisely because of the emphases upon the historical and cultural contingencies associated with this taxon, however, these attempts have been largely unsuccessful at producing any generalisable conclusions. The same evolutionary history of *H. sapiens* that can provide insights into the capacities for and constraints upon ritualized behaviors can also provide insights into those mental representations whereby such behaviors

126 This "hindsight bias" is a general characteristic of human cognition (Kahneman 2011, 202–204).

have been conceptualized, including those that might have been conceptualized as "religious" and provide, thereby, a clear theoretical object for a history of religious ritual.

Only recently have a few historians begun to acknowledge the evolutionary history of their human subjects and how this biological substrate might inform historical expressions and change. Among these I might mention explorations into the relationship between *History and Evolution*, in a volume with the same title, edited by Matthew and Doris Nitecki in 1992, and two theme issues of the journal *History and Theory*—in 1999 on *The Return of Science: Evolutionary Ideas and History* (Shaw and Pomper 1999), and in 2001 on *Agency After Postmodernism*" (Shaw 2001).

Most recently, an interdisciplinary group of scholars—including anthropologists, archaeologists, evolutionary biologists, geographers, historians, and linguists—has proposed an evolutionary framework for human history beginning in Africa some 80,000 years ago. In their volume, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present,* edited by Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail (2011), these scholars propose various "frames" whereby such a history might be imagined: for example, views of the body as a site of knowledge and power, energy requirements and interactions with ecosystems, communication and language, the production and exchange of food, genealogies and kinships, the migrations of populations, and the relationship between humans and their goods. Foremost among this group of scholars is the Harvard historian Daniel Lord Smail, who had introduced the notion of "deep history" in his programmatic work *On Deep History and the Brain,* published in 2008, in which he focused on the evolved bio-cognitive substrate of *H. sapiens.*[127]

Deep History

Like all products of disciplinary knowledge, histories are made in the context of what their frames will allow (Smail 2008, 43). In models of the physical cosmos, for example, if special moments in time, positions in space, and directions in space are singled out, the most important general laws will be obscured (Stenger 2008, 130). Historians have traditionally restricted the scope of their work precisely to a consideration of special times and particular places. More broadly,

127 Smail notes that his work was inspired by that of his father, John Smail, Professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Wisconsin, who, at the end of his career in the 1970s, began teaching a course on "The Natural History of Man" (Smail 2008, ix).

they have restricted their entire field of study to a consideration of the last 5,500 years or so, from the emergence of "civilizations"—usually with reference to the written records from Mesopotamia. Smail argues that a more appropriate frame for human history is not this secularized, i.e., presentized, version of the biblical story but is a narrative beginning with the emergence of *H. sapiens* in Africa some 60,000 to 85,000 years ago. He proposes a naturalistic frame for this history that includes the full scope of human existence, from periodizations of the Paleolithic and Neolithic, previously abandoned by historians to those concerned with "prehistory," through that which he terms the "Postlithic."

A "new appreciation for oral composition and social memory" Smail maintains, "has shown just how little the technology of writing has actually added to our ability to recall and duplicate the lessons of the past" (Smail 2008, 5). This realization, he concludes, "renders suspect the claim that writing has [had] a catalyzing effect on culture" (Smail 2008, 5; see also 66)—a surprising conclusion for some, perhaps, but one reached as well by the classicist Jocelyn Penny Small in *Wax Tablets of the Mind* (1997), her historical study of the introduction of writing into ancient Greece. In addition to written texts, Smail emphasizes that deep history will fully take into account any remains which encode information about the past: fossils, mitochondrial DNA, isotopes, behavioral patterns, potsherds, phonemes, as well as what we know about climatic and ecological changes, disease, webs and exchanges, human morphology, sex and gender, etc. (Smail 2008, 3, 48). One of the remains of the past—or at least of the past's legacy—for which we are increasingly knowledgeable is the evolutionary morphology and function of the human brain. It is this recently adumbrated knowledge around which Smail proposes the construction of a continuous narrative of human history (Smail 2008, 7, 156).

Historians have always made psychological assumptions about their subjects. Smail cites the example of Chester Starr, who, in his *History of the Ancient World*, wrote that if one is to understand "any era of the past one must be able to penetrate into the minds of its inhabitants" (Starr 1965, 27, cited by Smail 2008, 41). However, the psychological assumptions of historians have generally been implicit or, for the most part, decades out of date, as the continuing reliance by historians of religion on William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* illustrates. Deep history, then, is the acknowledgement by historians of humans' "genetic and behavioral legacy from the past" (Smail 2008, 118) for any understanding of their subjects' minds and motivations.

According to one leading hypothesis, "the large human brain has evolved over the past 1.7 million years [primarily] to allow individuals to negotiate the escalating complexities posed by human social living" (Smail 2008, 113). In cognitive tests recently administered to adult chimpanzees, orangutans and two-

year-old children, for example, Michael Tomasello found that the apes performed about the same as the children with the exception that children performed significantly better on tests that measured social skills such as social learning, theory of mind, and communication (Tomasello 2008). Following the work of Robin Dunbar (1996) and others who have decoupled communication from language, Smail notes, that "[o]ver the course of this evolutionary history, we [have] learned how to assess our status and our standing in the group largely through chemical clues [—from pheromones and hormones to an addiction to gossip (Smail 2008, 176)], and we became dependent on those clues as markers of our self-esteem and our sense of belonging" (Smail 2008, 163). These neurochemical mechanisms of human brains underlie and shape much human behavior in ways now recognized to be more important than language—and they do so in predictable ways. "Their existence means that [the] predispositions and behavioral patterns [of humans] have a universal biological substrate that simply cannot be ignored" by historians (Smail 2008, 114).

Whereas "[m]oods, emotions, and predispositions inherited from the ancestral past…form a [panhuman] structural backdrop for many things we do and have done" (Smail 2008, 117), human emotional *effects* are never universals but are particular to given cultures and individuals (Smail 2008, 116). While, for example, disgust is a human universal, the stimuli that elicit disgust are local. Such contingent stimuli are interesting to the historian for how they violate, manipulate, or modulate panhuman proclivities (Smail 2008, 117). Such practices as sports, education, novel reading, pornography, recreational sex, gossip, military training, or religious rituals all reinforce or inhibit synapses and receptors and stimulate, beyond baseline levels, the production or reuptake of various neurochemicals (Smail 2008, 118).

As an example of the significance of neurochemical manipulations for an analysis and understanding of human history, Smail refers to the exponential increase in the range of psychotropics that became readily available and widely pursued during the eighteenth-century, an age which he and others characterize as one of addiction (Smail 2008, 183, following Porter and Porter 1988, 217). Coffee, tea, sugar, chili peppers, chocolate and tobacco first became freely available in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century as did alcohol in the form of fortified wine and spirits, opium and nitrous oxide—and an economy developed for the production of and commerce in such psychotropics. In addition, this century witnessed a proliferation of the gossip-enabling environments of salons and cafes. The lower classes were drawn to gin and other spirits, the manufacture of which was heightened, in face of previously scarce resources, by the production of sugar on the slave plantations of the Caribbean and Brazil. Coffee, on the other hand, was the stimulant to mind, body, conversation, and creativity of the

leisure and commercial classes. By 1739, coffee houses outnumbered taverns in London and by the late eighteenth century, caffeine had made its way to the lower classes as well by way of tea. These psychotropic practices were paralleled by the flowering of the novel and its wild popularity, as well as an increase in the production of pornography. The accompanying "reading mania" was described by contemporaries as a disease or epidemic associated with physical exhaustion, the rejection of reality, and bodily immobility. Observers of the upsurge of reading at the time speak of its addictive quality, especially of danger for young women. The imagination excited by such reading might be drawn to other solitary practices such as masturbation (Smail 2008, 179–184). The knowledge of such practices might result in a reevaluation of the historical basis for the secularization characteristic of this century—as measured by declining attendance at religious services and confession (Smail 2008, 184)—as not being caused by any rationalizing effects of the Enlightenment, as is usually assumed, but by a turn from religion and ritual, as sources of dopamine and other chemical messengers, to newly available psychotropic items of consumption.

Smail differentiates the use of psychotropics into autotropic practices, whereby the body chemistry of the self is influenced, and teletropic practices, whereby the body chemistry of others is influenced. States, societies, and religious systems have spent, and continue to spend, significant resources seeking to suppress or to regulate autotropic practices, attempting, instead, to persuade people to adopt the more socially oriented teletropic mechanisms for modulating body states (Smail 2008, 178). Following Smail's proposals, then, a "deep" historical approach to the study of religious ritual provokes a rethinking of traditional historiography (and ethnography) which incorporates the implications of evolutionary and cognitive theorizing for both historical method and for comparative study. This history will trace the development of, changes in, effects of and relationships between various ritualized teletropic practices that have violated, manipulated, or modulated our evolved neurochemical systems within the context of religious systems.

Religious Rituals and Teletropic Practices

The initiation rites of the Graeco-Roman mysteries provide a clear example from the history of religions for the employment of teletropic practices in religious ritual.[128] On the basis of the surviving material and literary evidence, we can con-

128 This section is adapted from Martin 2005, Chapter 22, this volume.

clude that these rites included practices specifically designed to alter the body chemistry of initiates. Initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries, for example, was preceded by a preparatory period of fasting (Mylonas 1961, 258–259), a somatic deprivation that would have heightened the sensory effects of the rites and contributed to their salient character. This fast was broken with a ritual drinking of the *kykeon*, likely a fermented—or possibly a hallucinogenic—beverage (Wasson, Ruck and Hofmann 2008[1978]; Scarborough, 1991, 140, 166 n. 37). At dusk, the somatically deprived and intoxicated initiates were led by torchlight past a cave that was presented to them as the dreaded entrance to the underworld (Clinton 1992, 84–86) and, beyond, to the dark interior of the Telesterion, the chamber of initiation, where, according to iconographic representations, their vision was further masked by blindfolds (Bianchi 1976, nos. 47, 49–50). The now disoriented and frightened initiates were then startled by the acoustic anomaly of a gong, unexpectedly sounded from the midst of the darkness, as the Eleusinian hierophant summoned the goddess Kore from the underworld (Clinton 1992, 86 and n.128). Fasting, ingesting psychotropics, being presented with frightening visages, the disorienting effects of darkness, startling sounds, are all sensory techniques that would have contributed to the cognitive confusion and vulnerabilities of the initiates. According to Plutarch, this Eleusinian "night of the mysteries" culminated with an abrupt burst of brilliant light accompanying the sudden emergence of the hierophant from the darkness which further astonished the cognitively receptive initiates (Plu. *Mor.* 81E; also Hipp. *Haer.* 5.8.40 = *ANF* 5.3). When the initiates emerged from their initiatory ordeals of darkness into revelatory light, they could be represented, according to the reflections of the fourth-century philosopher Themistius, as "received into pure regions and meadows, with voices and dances and the majesty of holy sounds and shapes" (Them. in Stob. 4; cited by Mylonas 1961, 264–265).

Many of the elements of initiation into the later, second century AD, mysteries of Isis are reminiscent of the earlier Eleusinian rites, upon which they may have been modeled (Burkert 1987, 9; Heyob 1975, 57). According to the novelist and neo-Platonic philosopher Apuleius of Madaurus, our primary source for the Isaic rites, Isiac initiations, like those at Eleusis, were held after a preparatory period of fasting (Apul. *Met*. 11. 21), a somatic deprivation that contributed to the incubated dreams and visions reported by prospective initiates (Apul. *Met*. 11.22). Although Isiac initiations were not usually held in underground or darkened chambers (Wild 1981, 206), they were performed at night and were accompanied by exotic sounds, in this case, those of the Egyptian sistrum, a kind of rattle or rhythmic noisemaker (Apul. *Met*. 11. 4). Initiates were presented with brilliantly colored and visually arresting but cognitively dissonant cult images (Apul. *Met*. 11.3); they physically assaulted their bodies "until blood ran from

the bruised skin" (Turcan 1996, 118). After they, like the Eleusinian initiates, too, trod the fearsome threshold of the underworld and, in the words of Apuleius, returned from this "boundary of death," they witnessed, "the sun flashing with bright light" "in the middle of the night" as they "came face to face with the gods below and the gods above" (Apul. *Met*. 11. 23).

The vividly painted scenes of initiation on the walls of the Mithraeum of Capua Vetere in southern Italy give some idea of the dramatic ordeals with which Mithraic initiates were threatened within the darkened depths of the Mithraic temple, a "cosmic cave" that was replicated in the architecture of every mithraeum (Porph. *Antr.* 6; Vermaseren 1971, 24 – 42). In the first and second of these scenes, a blindfolded initiate (Vermaseren 1971, Pl. XXI) is depicted as bound and naked, menaced by fire and sword, and facing death (Vermaseren 1971, Pl. XXII; Vermaseren 1963, 132; Clauss 2001, 103). Dramatically, in a scene portrayed on a cup discovered in a mithraeum in Mainz, presumably also a initiatory scene (Horn 1994, 21 – 66), the initiating Father aims an arrow from his drawn bow directly at the head of the initiate who is portrayed, as at Capua, as smaller, naked and vulnerable (Beck 2000. Pl. XIII). The third and fourth panels of the Capua Vetere scenes of initiation are damaged and the scenes portrayed there obliterated (Vermaseren 1971, 34; Pl. XXIII), but the final panel of these scenes shows the initiate with his blindfold removed (Vermaseren 1971, Pl. XXV), presumably now to stand in the dazzling presence of his deity, *Mithras Sol Invictus*.

Hints of similar features also survive from the Dionysian mysteries, though the data is less clear and the interpretations contested. As in other mysteries, Dionysian initiations, according to Livy, occurred at night following a period of fasting (Livy 39.9.4; Turcan 1996, 308) and, like the other mysteries, Dionysian initiates are portrayed in iconography as blindfolded (Nilsson 1975, 79, Fig. 11; Bianchi 1976, P. 86) and nude (Nilsson 1975, 80 – 81, Figs. 12 and 13). And whatever one makes of the representation of the terrified woman portrayed on the left wall of the Dionysian frescoes in the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii, terrified, perhaps, by a scene on the opposite corner of a winged woman about to flog, or threatening to flog, a young woman, the Dionysian mysteries also included, in the words of Celsus, an inducement of "phantoms and terrors" (Or. *Cel*. 4.10), that is, "psychological ordeals" and threats, "as in the mysteries of Mithras" (Turcan 1996, 309). Certainly the drinking of wine was a persistent feature of all Dionysian cults, including its mysteries. The Dionysian initiation concluded with liberating ecstasies of inebriation and frenzied dance to the accompaniment of flutes, pan-pipes and cymbals, and the rhythms of castanets and timbrels (Turcan 1996, 311).

All of the initiatory practices of these mysteries made use of vivid and symbolic colors, esoteric imagery, exotic masks and costumes that would have contributed to the cognitive disorientation of initiates. These opulent sensory displays, heightened by the somatic deprivations of ritual preparation and exaggerated by the ingestion of prescribed psychotropics, would have been further intensified when presented in darkened chambers by the flickering light of oil lamps or torches (Turcan 1996, 108, 238) and accompanied by exotic and rhythmic sounds.

Because dramatic imagery and sensory displays are semantically limited and, consequently, equivocal, it is unlikely that the initiatory rites of the Graeco-Roman mystery religions conveyed any prescribed occult meanings, as they are often interpreted. Rather, such practices had the specific effect of exciting, suppressing, or altering body chemistry and of triggering specific emotional experiences associated with those effects (Heron 1967; Gombrich 1982; Lewis-Williams 2002, 67). What was established and communicated in the ritual initiations of the Graeco-Roman mysteries was, in other words, "chemical messengers" of social standing (Smail 2008, 176)—a conclusion about an initiatory conferral of status previously argued for Mithraism, for example, on sociological grounds (Gordon 1972) and averred to be a characteristic of all special-agent rituals, that is, those infrequently performed but high pageantry rituals considered to be performed by the gods themselves (or by their authorized surrogates) (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 13–14). The effects of the initiation rites of the Graeco-Roman mysteries also conform to cognitively based predictions about their socio-political consequences of establishing cohesion among members of small, face-to-face autonomous groups (Whitehouse 2004, 70–74).

If the eighteenth-century commodification of psychotropic practices instantiates their secularization, then the teletropic practices of the Graeco-Roman mystery religions exemplify their sacralization. But is there any significant difference between the various social expressions of ritualized psychotropic behavior and those that might constitute the theoretical object for a deep history of *religious* ritual?

Ritualized Behaviors and Religious Rituals

A number of researchers have emphasized that all ritualized behaviors are situated on a spectrum of ordinary, if constrained, human behavioral potentials. The spectrum of behavior associated with the rigidity and redundancy of religious rituals is, for example, also expressed developmentally as habitual behaviors by children, such as skipping over sidewalk cracks, or clinically as obsessive-com-

pulsive disorder (Boyer and Liénhard 2006; Freud 1959 [1907], 1953 [1927]). Behavior associated with rituals of trance and possession are also expressed as hypnotic states, multiple personality disorders, dissociative disorders, somnambulism, fugue states, catatonic states, and as the effects of dance, rhythmic, and musical saturation (Becker 2004, 1; Deeley 2008). The problem that remains, however, is what constraints allow ritualized behaviors to be interpreted as "religious" as opposed to ordinary or pathological.

Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons*, an improbable and often silly story of Vatican intrigue nevertheless offers an insightful passage in which one of its characters, a fictional researcher at CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire), suggests that what is religious experience may actually be idiosyncratic interpretations of altered states of consciousness—robust, if natural, psychotropic affects that have been excited by "emotionally charged situations" such as fear, stress, or trauma (Brown 2000, 484). This view of religious experience is now argued on historical grounds by cognitive archaeologist David Lewis-Williams (2002, 2010, 139–160). However "religious experiences" might be understood, the proposal that religious experiences are interpretations of hyperstimulated neurocognitive processes is suggestive.[129]

Smail notes that one of the more interesting behaviors of many animals is a rather wide-spread interest in modulating their brain-body states. Horses, for example, delight in startling themselves when bored, birds intoxicate themselves by eating alcohol-laden rotting fruit, and cats are drawn to catnip (Smail 2008, 127; on the intrinsically pleasurable motivation for and addictive quality of animal play, see Burghardt 2005, 72–73, 391–393). Psychotropic practices among humans seem to represent an analogous recreational diversion (Masters and Houston 1966; Goode 2000, 235–237). While our neurochemical body-brain systems, like those of other animals, certainly evolved to serve some adaptive function, they surely did not evolve for the purpose of being artificially stimulated or manipulated (Smail 2008, 127–128). As Smail puts it, the use of "psychotropic mechanisms, ranging from psychoactive drugs to pornography…simply cannot be explained by means of adaptive reasoning. The stuff is bad for you" (Smail 2008, 162). Rather, the evolved neurocognitive potentials of *H. sapiens* for altered states of consciousness were readily exapted for entirely different pur-

129 Whereas emotionally charged situations trigger the release of neurotransmitters such as epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine, and steroids such as glucocorticoid, that accelerate baseline neural activity, what gurus call higher-consciousness, might, as a consequence of their recommended techniques of meditation, better be modeled as a *suppression* rather than as an acceleration of baseline neural activity, as might what some consider to be answered prayer (Pyysiäinen 2001, 114–115).

poses (Smail 2008, 127–128, 160–161). Social institutions have promoted themselves throughout history by exploiting and sponsoring these neurocognitive potentials. One of these social institutions is that referenced as "religion."

If, in other words, "religious experiences" are not *sui generis* expressions of the supernatural upon which religious practices, ideas and institutions have been constructed—as argued from the Reformation theological emphasis on a confirmation of faith by an *experience* of God's grace to William James' psychological exposition of religious experience (James 1961 [1902], 42)—then they must have been ritually produced by the various religious institutions and idiosyncratically interpreted by them, as was the case with the initiation rites of the Graeco-Roman mysteries. But, if those ritually produced experiences represent deviations from baseline neurocognitive activity, their identification as *religious* represents a culturally contingent nominalism.

Virtually all scholarly attempts to identify "the religious" have been "top-down" approaches, that is, they begin with and employ the category as defined in terms of its cultural frame—the *interpretatio Graeca* of the classical world, for example, whereby the deities of others were equated with those of the Greek pantheon. The scholar's own view of religion, in other words, is extended to and determines his view of religion in general—ethnocentrism from the perspective of the anthropologist, another example of presentism from that of the historian.

The theoretical problem associated with top-down approaches to anything is formulated more precisely by the Italian cognitivist Riccardo Viale as the "pragmatic effect of context-dependent variables activated by the formation of a problem" in the first place (Viale 2006, 9; see also Nisbett and Masuda 2006), an effect that activates its own confirmation bias. As the philosopher Paul Davies put it, we can, with top-down approaches, "construct more than one taxonomy that seems to account for the high level capacity we wish to understand. What we... want to know, however, is which taxonomy is correct;...[i.e.,] which account accurately represents the layered...capacities of the system" (Davies 2003, 26).

Even if we were to beg the top-down question in favor of attempting to identify evolved component behaviors and representations "that might count as religious," as suggested by the cognitivist of religion Justin Barrett, for example (e.g., Barrett 2008a), the question remains as to who is doing the counting, on what basis, and in which environment (Lévi-Strauss 1966). It is, in other words, simply not possible to determine which "capacities" might be deemed necessary for a "religious system" at the evolutionary and cognitive level apart from an *a priori* historical or ethnographic constructions of what is taken to

be "religion."[130] And since these supposedly component behaviors of "religion," however identified, are considered to be evolved capacities of *H. sapiens* generally, they would be available to all humans in the construction of any of their ritualized behaviors, representations, or social systems. The question remains about how and why just those evolved behaviors and representations that are identified as constituting "religion" interact and bind together in the first place. In other words, there seems to be, from a top-down approach, simply no way to stipulate constraints upon what gets to be counted as "religious" beyond the cultural biases of the investigator (Saler 1993, Ch. 7).

What would seem to be required for any *scientific* specification of those human behaviors considered to be religious is a "bottom-up" approach that questions whether or not there might be any ordinary evolutionary or cognitive proclivities of *H. sapiens* that might differentiate certain sets of ordinary human behaviors and/or mental representations from their otherwise mundane expressions, however such behaviors might be categorized. I, and others, have argued that a necessary criterion for the inclusion of human behaviors in such a taxon might be their *legitimation by socially salient claims to the presence and authority of naturally produced representations of superhuman agency, the authority of which, in turn, motivates their practice and perseverance*. It is, in other words, such claims to the presence and authority of superhuman agents that allow us to differentiate between ordinary human behaviors, including ritualized behaviors, and those for which we are justified in employing the predicate "religious" (Lawson and McCauley 1990).

According to what has recently been termed the "standard model of religious cognition" (SMRC) (Bulbulia 2007; Jensen 2009), all such representations of agents with counterintuitive properties are richly inferential, easily memorable, and, thereby, readily transmittable (Boyer 2001). Their agentic character, on the other hand, appeals to ordinary cognitive templates of agency and renders them more or less culturally stable (Claidière and Sperber 2007).

Such a differentiating criterion would, in fact, seem to be the distinguishing characteristic of many of the behaviors and representations identified pre-theo-

130 In biology, behaviors or representations that are evolved cannot be determined at the phenotypical level since genes code for a gradient of possible forms that express differently according to environmental and developmental factors. This causal disparity between phenotype and genotype is suggested by August Weismann's 1883 work on heredity (1889a). Weismann demonstrated that there is no causal relationship between phenotype and genotype by amputating the tails of a number of newborn mice (12, not the 1500 often reported); whose 901 descendents nevertheless sported normally long mouse tails over five generations (not the over 20, also often reported) (Weismann.1889b, 431–433).

retically by ethnologists and by historians of religion as "religious." However, this criterion would also exclude some socially salient traditions often included in the taxon—much, if not most, of the Confucian tradition, for example, as well as "atheistic Buddhism," if, in fact, such a thing ever existed in practice. And, it would delete from consideration as "religious" such ideologies as Marxism or Freudianism and such behaviors as football or parades.

The stipulation as "religious" of those behaviors and representations for which superhuman legitimation is claimed builds, of course, upon E. B. Tylor's animistic definition. More specific definitions, Tylor cautioned, have "the fault of identifying religion...with particular [socio-historical] developments [rather] than with" any panhuman attributions (Tylor 1958 [1871], ii. 8). Although Tylor concluded that his "bare and meager definition...of religion will be found practically sufficient" (Tylor, ii. 10), I would argue that this heuristic stipulation for a taxon of "religion," while necessary, is *not* sufficient, for the problem remains of how to explain the differential valuation among various possible and available representations of superhuman agents.

Cognitive scientists have shown that "spiritual beings," or "superhuman agents," or, in the most recent formulation, "agents with counterintuitive properties" are, like ritualized behaviors, natural and frequent productions of human minds—from the imaginary friends of children (Taylor 1999), to the panoply of "little people"—fairies, trolls or leprechauns—to the figures of hallucinations and delusions, to benevolent as well as malevolent deities and demons, to cosmogonic gods. However, the problem remains of why some naturally produced, even culturally stable, agents with counterintuitive properties are held to be more authoritative than others and attributed, thereby, strategic information, proffered costly service, or considered to be omnipotent, etc., while others are held in less regard.[131] Would Smail conclude that those that become represented as legitimating authorities are those most robustly associated with mind-body altering substances and practices? Though an explanation for that association still remains to be made. Perhaps this problem of valuation and attribution is to be solved solely at the socio-historical level of analysis—although processes of such decision making are beginning to be addressed in most interesting ways by those

131 Justin Barrett describes five attributes of successful god concepts. They must be (1) counterintuitive, (2) an intentional agent, (3) possess strategic information, (4) able to act in the human world in detectable ways, and (5) capable of motivating behaviors that reinforce belief (Barrett 2008b). However, Barrett's phenomenology of god attributions doesn't explain the basis, cognitive or otherwise, for their selective attributions.

working in behavioral economics.[132] For now, we can stipulate that a deep history of "religious" rituals considers those ritualized behaviors of *H. sapiens*, which, whatever else they may do, alter mind-body chemistry, the effects of which are interpreted within a socio-religious context. Specifically, these psychotropic practices represent institutional strategies for "experiencing," that is, for focusing attention upon,[133] some contextually contingent representation of counterintuitive agency that may be implicated in the origin and formation of those representations, and that support the transmission of socio-cultural values that are associated with those representations.

Conclusion

In his prolegomenon to the possibilities of deep history, Smail proposes that at least "some of the direction that we detect in…history has been created by ongoing experiments with…psychotropic mechanisms that themselves were developed against the evolutionary backdrop of human neurophysiology" (Smail 2008, 187). The rise and rather rapid spread of the Graeco-Roman mystery religions in the second century AD, for example, may be explained—in part, at least—by the intensity and immediacy of their teletropic practices, especially when contrasted with a ceiling effect achieved by the emotionally salient but increasingly routinized and redundant grandeur of official Roman rites—political as well as religious—and, consequently, an ever-increasing demand for cognitive stimulation (de la Boétie 1971 [1562], cited by Smail 2008, 173; Martin, 2012). Such alternatives to the production and regulation of teletropic practices by the state explains also the suspicion of official Rome towards the attractiveness of new cult practices and its initial resistance to their introduction.

The teletropic initiation rites of the Hellenistic mysteries, then can be situated within the frame of deep history on a trajectory of practices by humans—some ritualized, some not—that can be documented from Paleolithic cave paintings (Lewis-Williams 2002), to the Neolithic cult practices at Eleusis, which may date as early as the fifteenth century B.C. (Mylonas 1961, 24), to the pilgrimages, rituals, and liturgical practices of Postlithic Western religions, to contemporary rites such as those of Freemasonry and religious revivals—and include such

132 For an interesting discussion of valuation, see the socio-cultural historian Krzystof Pomian 1978, 1988; for a recent behavioral-economic overview of decision making, see the cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman 2011.

133 On ritual as a mode of focusing, see Martin 2008b, 316 – 318.

non-religious addictive practices as sports, nationalistic rallies, internet games, texting, etc.

Many, but not all, of the institutions concerned with the regulation of psychotropic practices and with the promulgation of teletropy are "religious" in the sense of legitimating their strictures and advocacies with claims to the authority of superhuman agency—however that valuation of that agency might be explained. The psychotropic practices of such religious institutions should be of interest to historians and comparativists of religion because they offer an explanatory hypothesis for a patterning effect among diverse traditions and cultures. On the other hand, many institutions characterized by practices have legitimated their activity by claims to alternative loci of power, by power of the state, for example, or by juridical regulation. The history of such non-religious institutions should also be of interest to historians of religion because the widespread perdurance of imaginary authority alongside of, or even above, actual power has not been adequately explained. And, since religious claims are often moralized, the line between social benefit and the exploitation of society that derives from institutional sponsorship of these practices is often neglected by historians of a taxon that's been shaped by cultural biases (Smail 2008, 173).

Smail's explanatory paradigm fully recognizes a plasticity of synapses that allows for culture to be embedded in physiology. He does *not* do so, however, by reintroducing a cultural studies agenda gussied up with specious notions of cognitive semblance (Tallis 2011). Rather, Smail explains the influence of culture on cognition by identifying specific mechanisms whereby brain functions may be altered by cultural environments that are both constructed and constrained by those same brain functions (Smail 2008, 115). On the other hand, it has yet to be convincingly demonstrated that such practices might alter the human genotype—apart from analogies of historical change and cultural development to the evolutionary model of variation and natural selection, analogies that are, in my judgment, weak (Martin 2008a). "It is important to bear in mind," Smail reminds us, that if the human genotype isn't relatively stable, that "if genes cannot express themselves in generally predictable ways, [then] natural selection has nothing to act on" (Smail 2008, 138). Smail cautions, in other words, that recognition of the effects, manipulations, modulations and violations of brain-body systems that may operate to embed culture in physiology by way of psychotropic practices "should not be an excuse for bringing blank-slate behaviorism in through the back door" (Smail 2008, 138).

A neurophysiolgical approach to historiography—and especially to the history of religious rituals—has been suggested by others before Smail. I have referenced in this paper the work of Gordon Wasson and David Lewis-Williams.

While the work of both was met with controversy at the time of their publication, their arguments are, in light of more recent research, now considered more plausible.[134] Whatever one might conclude about the implications of such an approach for historiography, I accept the general thrust of Smail's own conclusion that: "[b]y bringing…neurophysiology into history, we also bring history to neurophysiology." Although Smail has urged historians to think with deep time, he has also urged scientists to think with history. "The new science of the brain," he concludes, "cannot make sense without history" (Smail 2008, 201–202).

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19. Performativity, Narrative, and Cognition: "Demythologizing" the Roman Cult of Mithras

> Mithraism is and will remain a subject with a very close and serious bearing upon the history of religious evolution.
>
> —John M. Robertson, 1901

Performativity, whether discursive or non-discursive, is now generally accepted as contributing to the regulation of bodies, both individual and social. While descriptions of the relationship between strategies of regulation and that which is regulated have been offered, little attention has been paid to theoretical explanation(s) for the mechanisms whereby such strategies are efficacious (Bell 1998, 208–211; Boyer 2001, 257). It is proposed here that cognitive processes offer such an explanation, specifically, that differing modes of performativity activate differing systems of memory that, in turn, have implications for socio-political association and thereby for the social construction of self and even of consciousness.[135] Following the suggestion of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1975, 207–14, *apud* Bateson 1972, 372–74, 411–25), performativity may be understood cognitively as a non-verbal or "analogic" coding of knowledge to be remembered and transmitted (Barth 1987, 69–70, 75). Together with iconic representation, "performativity" can be contrasted with "narrativity," a "digital" coding of knowledge which involves a serial processing and organization of data according to some implicit logic, as in "a computer program or, largely, a language" which can be transmitted as an appropriate and easily remembered story, myth or collection of doctrine (Barth 1975, 207; Whitehouse 2000, 64).[136] As Barth concludes: "The code in which a body of knowledge is cast will tend to entail a definition of the nature of the object of knowledge, and will influence the kind of knowledge that is produced" (Barth 1987, 75).[137] The

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135 In his evolutionary and relentlessly "bottom-up" theory of mind, the neuro-scientist Gerald Edelman has presented a complex but compelling argument that consciousness is "a special set of relationships between perception, concept formation, and memory" (Edelman 1992, 149).

136 Language *per se* can, of course, convey analogic meanings as, for example, with paratactic constructions in which signifiers are juxtaposed asyntactically in ways that loosen constraints upon the possible signifieds.

137 Barth suggested the cognitive process of "analogic coding" in his reflections on the initiation systems he encountered in his fieldwork among the Baktaman of inner New Guinea in 1969 (Barth 1975, 207–14, 227; see also Atran 2002, 40–41). Analogical *thinking* is, of course, also a possible consequence of digital *coding*; in fact, it has been argued that such thinking constitutes the very core of all human cognition (Hofstadter 2001; on analogical thinking generally, see Gentner *et al.* 2001). However, the possibilities for analogical thinking are maximized if the encoding of source information is itself analogical, i.e., if it stresses relational or structural

validity of a cognition-based hypothesis will be tested against the data of Hellenistic religions, especially the Roman cult of Mithras, a project which, in turn, raises the theoretical question of the utility of employing a cognition-based social-scientific model in historical research generally.

Roman Mithraism and the Historical Problem

The Roman cult of Mithras is documented from the end of the first century CE and it spread widely throughout the Roman Empire over the next 300 years. Whereas a profusion of archaeological remains from this cult has been, and continues to be, discovered,[138] no corpus of Mithraic doctrine or mythic narrative survives. Research on the Roman cult once focussed largely on reconstructing a presumed Mithraic myth by proposing transformations in transmitted versions of the ancient Persian myth of Mithras in ways that might conform to the Western iconographic evidence. More recent research, however, has focused on deciphering that iconography itself (Beck 1984), especially its apparent astronomical/astrological structuring (Beck 1988; Ulansey 1989)—still, however, with a view towards reconstructing a Mithraic myth which might, in turn, be "demythologized" to reveal a theological system assumed to be encoded therein (Martin 1994a; Clauss 2001, 11). This view was formulated already in the nineteenth century: "There is no doubt but that... [Mithraic imagery], if it could be interpreted, would be found to contain a complete summary of the Mithraic creed" (King 1886, 340). But what if there was no more or less commonly held and transmitted Mithraic creed, or even Mithraic myth, to be reconstructed (Burkert 1987, 69)? —a possibility recently suggested for Roman religions generally (Beard *et al.* 1998, 1: 158).

In 1990 I suggested an approach to the study of Mithraism that would not assume a lost Mithraic myth to be reconstructed, or any common set of precepts encoded in Mithraic iconography, but an approach, rather, that would focus solely upon the evident character of Mithraism as an iconic tradition. I suggested, for ex-

features. Equally important is whether the retrieval cue for that information also stresses relational or structural features (Dunbar 2001, 324–29). The corpus of knowledge transmitted in many initiation rites, such as those described by Barth, is, of course, structural, i.e., procedural, involving knowledge about the ritual itself rather than any specific content or meaning (see also Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994 on the Jain *puja*; and Martin 1995 on the Hellenistic mystery cults).

138 An important new mithraeum was recently (2000) discovered in the excavations of the Crypta Balbi (Via delle Botteghe Oscure, 31) in the very centre of urban Rome near the foot of the Capitoline Hill itself. Founded in an *insula* in approximately 200 CE, this mithraeum was in use until the end of the fourth century (Gordon 2001).

ample, that the ubiquitous tauroctonous image, the central portrayal of Mithras slaying a bull, might not represent a climactic scene from a narrative cycle of Mithraic myth but serve, rather, as an "apt formalization and focalization" for "the shared orientation" of a Mithraic culture (Martin 1994a, 219, 224).[139]

In the same year that I made my suggestion, Manfred Clauss published his book *Mithras: Kult und Mysterien* (Clauss 1990; English trans. 2001) in which he contends that Mithraism is "an example of the primacy of images in the ancient world" (Clauss 2001, 17). Scholars of such religions, he argues,

> tend to understand [such] mythological and religious images primarily as allegorical guises for conceptual claims. But in ancient religion images, or rather the ways in which people perceived images, were based upon a quite different psychology. They were apprehended directly...In all likelihood, such images did not need to be explained conceptually (Clauss 2001, 11–12).[140]

Despite this important insight, Clauss nevertheless retains the view that "the Mithraic cult-reliefs depict a sacred narrative" (Clauss 2001, xx),[141] for which he ventures a rather detailed reconstruction (Clauss 2001, 62–101).[142]

Clauss' claim about the imagistic character of Mithraism, and about that of ancient religions in general, especially his suggestion that the perception of images in such contexts was based upon "quite a different psychology" than that of conceptual explanation, is particularly intriguing in light of a cognitive theory of alternative modes of religiosity, an imagistic and a doctrinal mode, recently proposed by the anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse to explain certain tendencies of "codification, transmission, cognitive processing, and political association" among

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139 The suggestion of a "focalization" for some "shared orientation" is from Sperber 1975, 136–37.

140 In his innovative investigations into the world of early Christianity, Keith Hopkins has a contemporary time-traveller take note of the imagistic quality of everyday life in the Roman empire and the performative character of its religion by opining that "[t]here is no justification for privileging informants who intellectualise religions" (Hopkins 1999, 24). This latter point has been argued by Humphrey-Laidlaw with respect to ritual: "one of the distinctive features of ritual is the *consistent* displacement of intentional meaning" (Humphrey-Laidlaw 1994, 260, *contra*, in the case of Mithraic ritual, Beck 2000, 156). Even where religion is textually documented in the Roman context, "stories, not analysis," Hopkins concludes, "were the stuff of religious persuasion" (1999, 4).

141 This phrase from the "Foreword" of the English translation does not appear in the "*Einleitung*" of the German edition.

142 "Sacred narrative" in the English translation of Clauss has greater resonance with some currents of *religionsgeschichtliche* theory than does the "*Mithras-Legende*" of the German edition (Clauss 1990, 71).

the Mali Baining with whom he lived in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea, for 20 months between 1987 and 1989 (Whitehouse 2000, 1; 1995, 193 – 221, elaborated further in Whitehouse 2000).

Whitehouse characterizes the "imagistic mode of religiosity," which he modelled on a ritualistic revival group among the Baining settlements of Dadul and Maranagi, as a diversity of precepts and practices that is based on the local exegesis associated with small-scale, face-to-face groups and that are transmitted episodically, through infrequently, performed rituals—traits of social organization, ritual practice and local knowledge that seems to be associated with what is known of Mithraism.[143] He distinguishes this "imagistic mode of religiosity" from a more familiar "doctrinal mode" which is associated with the widespread affirmation and transmission of a commonly held set of beliefs that are narratively expressed and cogently argued. The often complex set of beliefs and teachings characteristic of this mode are authorized by a centralized authority and controlled through frequently repeated verbal practices such as instruction, sermonizing, exegetical study, etc. It is this model of religiosity, modelled by Whitehouse on the Pomio Kivung—a relatively stable cargo cult, which has elected representatives to the national assembly—that is especially characteristic of those groups in Papua New Guinea that were influenced by Western missionaries, with which Western scholars are most familiar from their own cultural context, and which often seems to have been assumed in attempts to comprehend the non-Christian Hellenistic religions.[144] On the basis of my (and Clauss') earlier suggestions about the imagistic

143 Some 75 years ago, Raffaele Pettazzoni noted morphological parallels between the initiation rites of the Greek mystery cults and those of some Australian tribes (Pettazzoni 1997 [1924], 21 – 44; I am indebted to Giovanni Casadio for this reference), and 40 years ago, Maarten Vermaseren, one of the great scholars of Mithraism, suggested that certain features of Mithraism might be found among what he then termed "the primitive peoples of Australia, Africa and America today" (Vermaseren 1963, 129). Neither, however, offered any theoretical basis or justification for these ethnographic analogies.

144 Whitehouse aptly cites W. Robertson Smith's observation that: "the study of religion [in the 18th and 19th centuries and, we might add, in the 20th] has meant mainly the study of Christian beliefs, and instruction in religion has habitually begun with the creed, religious duties being presented to the learner as flowing from the dogmatic truths he is taught to accept. All this seems to us so much a matter of course that, when we approach some new or antique religion, we naturally assume that here also our first business is to search for a creed, and find in it the key to ritual and practice...[B]ut in ancient religion...practice preceded doctrinal theory. Men form general rules of conduct before they begin to express general principles in words" (W. R. Smith 1972 [1894], 16, 20; cited by Whitehouse 2000, 186).

character of Mithraism I shall argue that Roman Mithraism is best understood as representative of an "imagistic" mode of religiosity.[145]

Mithraic Practices

Although the frequency and character of ritual practice stands at the centre of Whitehouse's theory of modes of religiosity, we know relatively little about the ritual practices of Mithraism except that admission to the group involved initiation rites (*mysteria*) and that this membership seemingly participated in communal meals, apparently in commemoration of their initiation (Clauss 2001, 113). We can presume, on the basis of the *triclinia* (dining couches) along the two side walls of virtually every mithraeum,[146] and from the iconography showing Sol

145 The distinction between an imagistic/performative and a doctrinal mode of religiosity was anticipated for Graeco-Roman religions by A. D. Nock who differentiated, on descriptive grounds, between religions in which "the essential element is…practice" and those in which "reason is all-important and the practice flows from it and is in a sense secondary" (Nock 1933, 3). Whitehouse's model was anticipated theoretically by the medievalist Brian Stock (Stock 1983, 12–92).

146 As the name implies, the *triclinium* (Greek, *triklinos*) was an arrangement of three couches along three walls of a dining room, the forth wall being broken by a door, and with a table in the centre. According to Plutarch, "different peoples hold different places in honour" according to the position upon these couches assigned or accorded them with reference to the door or entrance (Davidson 1997, 44): "the Persians the most central place, occupied by the king; the Greeks the first place; the Romans the last place on the middle couch…; and some of the Greeks who dwell around the Pontus…contrariwise the first place of the middle couch" (*Mor.* 619 B). Concerns with the designations of social rank was a protocol characteristic of sacrificial meals (Rundin 1996, 188). In the architectural iconography of the mithraeum, the cult-niche with its dominating image of Mithras was always situated on the back wall of the mithraeum between the two benches or couches, occupying, thereby, the place that was for Persians the place of royal or highest honour. As Clauss concludes, the Persian god Mithras "himself was always the host" of the Mithraic communal meal (Clauss 2001, 113).

If the culinary conventions of the Greek symposium were followed in the mithraeum, a not unlikely influence given the Sophistic revival in Rome that was contemporaneous with the spread of Mithraism, participants would recline on their left sides, reserving their right hands for communal eating and drinking (Davidson 1997, 22–23). In the mithraeum, those reclining on the left bench would be arrayed in a manner opposite but complementary to those reclining on the right bench with their bodies aligned in a clockwise manner. The figure of Mithras in the central tauroctonous image on the posterior wall of the mithraeum not only positioned Mithras as honoured guest, but always precisely according to the arrangement of the classical symposium, i.e., facing towards the right, clockwise arrangement of repose, even as he glances over his shoulder towards those to his left. The glance to the left may indicate the counter-clockwise circulation of eating, drinking and/or conversation that was characteristic of the classical

and Mithras sharing such a meal while sitting on the hide of a bull (*CIMRM* 42,13; 49; 483; 835,2; 966,C5; 988; 1036,2; 1084,2; etc.), (presumably the bull that is portrayed as being slain in the tauroctonous scene),[147] as well as from scenes portraying members of the community sharing a similar meal (*CIMRM* 390r5; 693a; 782; 1175, etc), that the communal meal was a repeated ritual associated with group maintenance (Clauss 2001, 61). Initiation into membership, on the other hand, by definition was performed but once by any initiate (or once upon his[148] initiation into each of any differentiated grades of initiation). In contrast to rituals that are frequently repeated and which tend, consequently, to become routinized (Freud 1907), infrequently performed rituals are typically characterized by a high degree of pageantry and sensory arousal. These rituals, which in some contexts are associated with literally life-threatening ordeals (Whitehouse 2000, 23), are termed by Whitehouse "rites of terror" (Whitehouse 2000, 18 – 33), precisely the term that has been used to characterize Mithraic initiation by commentators, both ancient[149] and modern (Boyle 1987, 70).[150]

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symposium. James Davison's conclusions about the physical array of these symposia well corresponds with what we know of the mithraea and the practices therein. They "occupied a space perfectly commensurate with the walls. The atmosphere was correspondingly intense and intimate. Nothing takes place behind the drinkers; the whole visual space is constructed to make sight lines converge and to ensure reciprocity. The sympotic space conspired with the effect of alcohol to create a sense of entering a separate reality...[This] severing of ties to the extramural world was effected with a repertoire of images and discourse peculiar to itself"(Davidson 1997, 44). In Graeco-Roman iconography, including that of architectural decor, the *triclinium* represented "the aristocratic life and ideal" generally (Dentzer 1971, 254); this ideal may suggest something of a social status, alternative to that of the initiate's everyday station, to which Mithraic participants aspired (Gordon 1972). As Whitehouse concludes, the "revelations" of exclusivistic communities generally "combine(s) the violation of semantic [learned] knowledge" (Whitehouse 2000, 51) so that initiates are "capable of conceptualizing the social world, and their place within it, in a radically new way" (Whitehouse 2000, 39).

147 A reciprocal but non-discursive relationship between the sacrifice of the bull (associated with initiation) and the celebration of a shared meal while sitting on the hide of the bull (membership) is suggested in Mithraic imagery, especially by the reversible reliefs which feature a representation of the tauroctony on one side and that of the meal on its opposite (see, e. g., *CIMRM* 397; 641; 1083; 1137; 1896; etc.).

148 Mithraic membership seems to have been restricted to males, but see Porphyry, *Abst*. 4.16.

149 Lamprocles, *Com*. 9: "It is usual [in the initiatory rites of Mithraism] for something to be said, or feigned to be done for the purpose of causing terror" (*quum illic aliguid ad speciem timoris vel dici vel fingi solent*).

150 A leader of a contemporary initiatory group has perceptively summarized this point: "Historians often forget ceremonies must be impressive if they are to stir the deepest waters of the

The presumed scenes of initiation in the Mithraeum of Capua Vetere give some idea of the dramatic ordeals with which Mithraic initiates were threatened (Vermaseren 1971, 24–42). In the first of these scenes an initiate is portrayed as bound and naked, as menaced by sword and fire, and as undergoing a symbolic death (Vermaseren 1963, 132) or execution (Clauss 2001, 103). Similarly, in an initiatory scene on a cup discovered in a mithraeum in Mainz (Horn 1994), the initiating Father is aiming an arrow from his drawn bow directly at the initiate who is portrayed as smaller, naked and vulnerable (Beck 2000, plate XIII). Such scenes recall Tertullian's description of Mithraic initiation as a *mimicus martyrii*, "mimicry of martyrdom" (*De Cor.* 15.4). As *my-*, the root of *mystai* (initiate), having the sense of closed or shut eyes suggests, the initiate is depicted as blindfolded throughout these ordeals (Vermaseren 1971, plates XXI and XXII),[151] as were initiates into the Eleusinian mysteries (Bianchi 1976, 47, 49–50) and into those of Dionysus (Nilsson 1957, figs. 11, 12, 18), the latter of which were also portrayed as naked (Nilsson 1957, figs. 12, 13).[152]

The third and fourth panels of the Capua Vetere scenes of initiation are damaged and the scenes portrayed there obliterated (Vermaseren 1971, 34, plate XXIII), but the final panel of these scenes shows the initiate with his blindfold removed

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soul. To depend on the oratory or presence of a single person in all temples to Mithras would have been suicidal...It was imperative the ceremonies be impressive" (Cooper 1996, 27–28).

151 Compare the observation by an anonymous fourth-century commentator that "they are deceived in the cave when they have their eyes blindfolded" (*Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti* 113.11; cited by Clauss 2001, 103).

152 Depictions of blindfolded initiates may, of course, not reflect actual practices but may analogically represent the initial setting of initiation in a dark room or dim chamber. Depending upon intensity and duration of prior exposure to light, the human eye's adaptation to dark proceeds relatively slowly, up to an hour in the extreme situation in which one is plunged from a very bright environment into total darkness, but from 15 to 20 minutes under less extreme conditions. Seeing in dim light depends upon the transformation of light into patterns of neural activity by the retinal rod cells which are highly sensitive to light and movement but which give a very poor visual acuity; retinal cone cells, by contrast, provide the basis for colour discrimination and, being clustered about the fovea, for visual acuity. Further, the dilation of the pupil under conditions of low levels of illumination increases saturation of the peripheral rod cells and decreases that of the cone cells. Under these conditions, the visual field is quite unstable and various illusions and entoptic phenomena may occur (Verplanck 1949; Green 2000), producing a cognitive state of ambiguity that is quite congenial to the manipulation of initiatory revelations, especially in the presence of dramatically illuminated analogic representations (Vermaseren 1963, 67; Clauss 2002, 52), especially the pierced reliefs and altars behind which light could be placed, e.g., from the Housesteads and Carrawburgh mithraea in the area of Hadrian's Wall, the pierced lead plaque with the Sungod's head from the S. Prisca mithraeum in Rome, or the white marble statue of Mithras as bull-killer in the Terme di Mitra in Ostia, stunningly illuminated by natural light from above; see Maré 2002, 253).

(Vermaseren 1971, plate XXV). This ritualized emergence into light out of the ordeals of initiatory darkness recalls the epitome of Eleusinian initiation by the fourth-century philosopher Themistius. At first, he writes, the initiate wanders

> through the dark as one uninitiated: then come all the terrors before the final initiation, shuddering, trembling, sweating, amazement: then one is struck with a marvelous light, one is received into pure regions and meadows, with voices and dances and the majesty of holy sounds and shapes. (Stobaeus 4; cited by Mylonas 1961, 264–65; cf. Apuleius [*Met*. 11.23] on Isiac initiation)[153]

The sensory disorientation wrought by a sudden emergence from darkness into light, by the "holy sounds" of the cult ritual, the sudden sounding of a gong by the Hierophant of Eleusis in summons of Kore (Clinton 1992, 86 and n. 128), for example, or the rattling of *sistras* by Isiac initiates, together with the unfamiliar and exotic "shapes" of the cult iconography would have rendered initiates more susceptible to reception of novel cult precepts (Turcan 1996, 112, 108).

Although charges of brandings (Tertullian, *De praescr. haeret*. 40), and worse,[154] were made of Mithraic initiation practices by Christian apologists, the actuality of such extreme ordeals has been questioned (Beskow 1979).[155] In any case, according to a suggestion by Aristotle, it was the psychological effects consequent upon the anticipation of terrifying ordeals, not necessarily their actual enactment, that characterized initiation into the mysteries (Arist. frag. 15, and *apud* Synesios,

153 Initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries has also been described, by ancient as by modern authors, as involving rites of "fear and terror" (Clinton 1993, 85; for Clinton's reconstruction of the non-narrative but experiential and visual character of Eleusinian initiation, see 1993, 84–90).

154 See, in the sixth century, Nonnus, *In Julianium Imperatorem invectivæ duæ* (*PG* 36: 989), and in the eighth century, Cosmas of Jerusalem (*PG* 38: 506).

155 Most of the specific references to Mithraic initiation are often from late and always from polemical sources. The character of these sources should not, *for these reasons alone*, preclude their possible relevance. After all, analogies to aspects of alleged Mithraic initiation rites, e.g., oaths of secrecy administered to blindfolded initiates under the threat of death and mutilation by sword or knife, and followed by the removal of the blindfold and admission into the brotherhood of light, are employed by such modern groups as Freemasons and related groups (Knight 1986, 316–17; Buckley 2002, 166–67). Such psychological similarities are so great that some writers have argued for historical continuity between Mithraic rite and modern ceremony (e.g., King 1887, 420–22; Heckethorn 1897, Vol. 2; Wynne-Tyson 1972, 185–90 [following King]; Cooper 1996, chap. 2). Although similarities between Mithraism (and ancient "mysteries" generally) and such modern groups as Freemasonry are often exaggerated by those unconstrained by the evidential requirements of modern scholarship, analogies between such groups, when viewed from a cognitive perspective, may well prove insightful in the face of an absence of adequate historical information from antiquity.

Orat. 48; see Burkert 1987, 69, 89). Perhaps portrayals of rites of terror, as in the Capua Vetere Mithraeum or on the Mainz Mithraic cup, do not depict actual rites but were, rather, an imagistic technique intended to heighten the psychological effects of an initiate's impending initiation (Buckley 2000, 176). As Zaidman and Pantel conclude of the Eleusinian rites, "[i]nitiation in the Mysteries, then, apparently did not involve instruction of a dogmatic nature, but was rather a process of internal transformation, founded upon the emotional experiences of a direct encounter with the divine" (Zaidman and Pantel 1992, 139).

It is the effects of initiation and not so much the various acts associated with their performance—and certainly not any purported teachings—that allows us to relate Mithraic initiation practices to those of others, to those of the Eleusinian mysteries, for example, as well as to those of the contemporary cults in Papua New Guinea described by Whitehouse. In all of these cases, a "clearly defined social group" is constituted by passage through shared initiatory "rites of terror" rather than by any instruction in and adherence to a set of beliefs held in common (Allen 1967, 5–6). As Donald Tuzin, drawing upon social-psychological studies of attitude change among contemporary victims of terrorism, concludes of initiation rites among the Ilahita Arapesh of Papua New Guinea:

> Under certain conditions the victim of extreme terror...experiences love and gratitude toward, and deep identification with, his persecutors. During the ordeal, of course, the novice's attitudes are at best highly labile; but immediately following it, the initiators drop their razors, spears, cudgels, or what have you, and comfort the boys with lavish displays of tender emotion. What resentment the latter may have been harbouring instantly dissipates, replaced by a palpable warmth and affection for the men who, moments before, had been seemingly bent on their destruction. As their confidence recovers itself, the novices become giddy with the realization that they have surmounted the ordeal. If there is an element of identification disclosed in this remarkable transformation...then the terror component may well be essential if the cult, and indeed the society itself, is to continue in its present form. (Tuzin 1980, 77–78, cited by Whitehouse 2000, 29).

Initiatory "rites of terror" establish, in other words, "an expression and an experience of solidarity" unlike that produced, or even articulatable, by any discursive practice (Whitehouse 1995, 112, 126). It is the trenchant memories of such shared rites that forge a particular collective identity and provide the basis for its maintenance and transmission.

Initiation, Memory and Social Maintenance

At the beginning of the last century, Maurice Halbwachs argued that collective memory is central to the identity and maintenance of any group (Halbwachs

1980, 1992). His work contributed to a number of studies that explored how ideologically shaped images of identity are employed in the construction of a commemorated past. But how do the mental functions of memory themselves contribute to and constrain the construction of identity-formation and its contingent ideology (Whitehouse 2000, 5, 11)?

Since the work of Halbwachs, psychologists have described a complex system of human memory in which short-term or working memory is distinguished from long-term memory, which is, of course, key to the maintenance and transmission of any collective identity. Long-term memory, in turn, is divided into procedural memory, a learned but relatively unconscious sort of memory associated with, for example, riding the proverbial bicycle, and an explicit memory of learned materials that are subject to more or less ready recall. Explicit memory is further differentiated into semantic or encyclopaedic memory and episodic or autobiographical memory (Tulving 1972; for a good overview of recent research on memory, see Schacter 1996; but see Edelman 1992, esp. 238). Semantic memory refers to mental representations of a general, propositional nature learned and reinforced through repetition, while episodic memory refers to mental representations of personally experienced events, especially momentous events that become conceptualized as unique experiences in one's life in which the time and place of encoding, together with the identity of co-participants in the event, become part of the representation (Whitehouse 2000, 5, 113, *apud* Tulving 1972). In contrast to semantic memory, associated with repeated and routinized learning, it is this episodic memory system that is activated by the sorts of portentous initiation rites documented by anthropologists working in Papua New Guinea and apparently for the Mithraists.

A particularly salient type of episodic memory, often referred to as "flashbulb" memory, i.e., a memory that results from participation in some particularly vivid or catastrophic event (Brown and Kulik 1982; Whitehouse 2000, 119–21; McCauley and Lawson 2002), seems to be associated especially with the abrupt and overwhelming sentience that is characteristic of many initiation rites. From among the Hellenistic mysteries, for example, one recalls such ritually contrived analogues to a literal sense of the "flashbulb" metaphor as Apuleius' literary report of Isiac initiates witnessing "in the middle of the night...the sun flashing with bright light" (*Met*. 11.23), or Plutarch's reference to initiates being startled on the night of the mysteries by the Eleusinian hierophant's sudden appearance out of the darkness of the Telesterion in a brilliant light (*Mor.* 81E; also Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.8.40).

Isiac initiation was further described by Apuleius as preceded by a period of fasting (*Met*. 11.23), as was participation in the Eleusinian night of the mysteries (Mylonas 1961, 258–59)—a somatic deprivation common to initiation rites which

would heighten the sensory effects of the initiation and contribute to its "episodic" character. And although there is no direct evidence of preparatory fasting in Mithraism, some scholars assume such was the case (Cumont 1956 [1903], 160; Vermaseren 1963, 136). Similarly, the employment of masks during their repeated communal meals, documented from some Mithraic communities,[156] apparently with reference to grades of initiation (Kane 1975, 344), would also recall and heighten the episodic character of Mithraic initiations and, through the sensory effects of its pageantry,[157] evoke and reinforce initiatory solidarity.[158]

The "cognitive shocks" produced by initiatory "rites of terror" and subsequently commemorated in analogous and emotionally heightened practices during celebratory rituals establishes, Whitehouse concludes, those "enduring episodic memories upon which solidarity and enduring face-to-face relationships" are maintained (Whitehouse 2000, 12; also Atran 2002, 164).

Socio-Political Features of Mithraism

Because of the number of mithraea that have been discovered, along with a profusion of inscriptions, mostly dedicatory (Beck 2000, 178 n. 158; Clauss 2001, xxi), more is known of the socio-political features of Mithraism than is known of its practices. With few exceptions (e. g., the mithraeum beneath the Baths of Caracalla [*CIMRM* 457]), mithraea are small, able to accommodate no more than 20 to 30 people. This, together with the relatively large estimates of still undiscovered sites, presumably with similar proportions (Martin 1989, 2–6, *apud* Coarelli

156 Konjica (*CIMRM* 1896), Dura-Europos (*CIMRM* 42), the Aventine in Rome (Vermaseren and van Essen 1975, 155–60, 167–72).

157 An anonymous fourth-century Christian apologist ridicules but nevertheless captures something of the ebullient character of the masked commemorations celebrated by the Mithraists when he observes that "[s]ome like birds flap their wings imitating the raven's cry; others roar like lions" (*Quæstiones veteris et novi testamenti* 113: 11 [*PL* 2214], cited from Gedden 1990 [1925], 65).

158 In addition to cult meals, mnemonic celebratory rituals would include, of course, participation by members of Mithraic groups in the induction rites of new initiates. As Scott Atran concludes of such rites: "[A]ccurate recall of details by those undergoing terrifying initiations requires two broad sets of conditions: if mood-dependent or emotionally arousing aspects of the original situation reoccur, so that a person feels compelled to better recall in order to cope with it; or if a socially secure environment is convincingly provided so that the person feels better able to integrate adversity and overcome it. For religious initiations—witnessed as part of a congregation rather than suffered as individuals—seem to fulfil both conditions" (Atran 2002, 163–64).

1979), suggests that Mithraism originated and remained organized as relatively small, face-to-face groups (Clauss 2001, 105). Such closely bonded, exclusivist communities, most often structured by claims of fictive kinship (Martin 1997; for Mithraism, Vermaseren 1963, 129),[159] are typically resistant to rapid and widespread diffusion, as are actual kin-groups. Among the Graeco-Roman initiatory cults, the mysteries of Demeter, for example, presumably originated as an Eleusinian family cult (Rohde 1925, 221), remained securely situated in Eleusis despite early Athenian hegemony in the area (Martin 1986) and despite attempts to establish rival celebrations elsewhere (Martin 1990). When such communities do spread, they do so slowly and inefficiently by means of contagion (Mensching 1976, 101), by which one group comes into contact with some other group and that with another and so forth in a "chainlike process of transmission between contiguous populations" (Whitehouse 2000, 49, 77; see Sperber 1996, 1–7, 25–27, 57–61; Boyer 2001, 46–47).[160] In other words, it is suggested that the dissemination of such groups was

159 Mithraic groups were apparently led by a *pater* and members referred to one another as *frater* (but see Gordon 1972, 101 and n. 49). Although structured internally by kinship claims, such religious groups in the Roman Empire were often publically organized as "a corporation with the right of holding property and the right to administer its funds according to certain rules" (Clauss 2001, 139; see Beck 1996).

160 Stephen Knight (1984, 124–25) has shown anecdotally that Freemasonry recruits by friendship links rather than by theology , and some modern "secret societies" invite potential members to attend their "private rituals" along with initiate members (Bryan 2001, 3). On social-scientific grounds, Rodney Stark contends that conversion to new groups generally "tends to proceed along social networks formed by interpersonal attachments" and is "not about seeking or embracing an ideology" (Stark 1996, 17, 18; see Loftland and Stark 1965). Stark has developed his theory with data from new religious movements in the United States, primarily the Unification Church (Moonies) and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), and has applied this theory productively to early Christianity. The Mithraic reversible reliefs, found only along the Roman *limes*, prime sites for the induction of mercenaries into the Roman legions (Martin 1994a, 222–24), might offer a clue to the recruitment techniques of the Mithraists. Since the Mithraic meal was apparently a repeated ritual, and since repeated rituals are generally non-exclusivist—in contrast to such non-repeated rituals as initiation (McCauley and Lawson 2002)—might the table-fellowship of the Mithraic meal have provided not only a reaffirmation of membership for initiates but also a social occasion for Mithraic recruitment? The question can be posed, in other words, as to which is to be considered the anterior side of the reversible reliefs and which the posterior? Because of the ubiquity and centrality of the tauroctonous scene in the mithraea, scholars who are concerned to (re)construct a Mithraic myth have simply assumed that this scene is the primary scene and the meal consumed while sitting on the hide of the bull is secondary, that is, sequential to the slaying of the bull (e.g., Beck 2000, 146). By this logic, initiation of new members into the Mithraic group would follow upon the meal while the tauroctonous scene, with its presumed analogical connection to initiation, would be the posterior. From a performative perspective, however, these two scenes would represent non-se-

through "strings of contact" rather than through verbally or textually articulated "strings of logically connected dogma" (Whitehouse 2000, 14, 36, 37).[161] In fact, as is often the case with traditional systems of initiation, there are "strict taboos (backed by formidable sanctions) against the verbalization of religious revelations" (Whitehouse 2000, 54). Such "prohibitions on idle chatter about sacred cult activities amount to something rather different from what is usually meant by the term 'secrecy'" (Whitehouse 2000, 92; see Martin 1995, esp. 109 with respect to the trials of Aeschylus [Aristophanes, *En.* 3.1; Plutarch, *Vit. Alc.* 22.3] and Alcibiades [Thucydides, 6.28, 61; Plutarch, *Vit. Alc.* 19] for "profaning," i.e., publicizing the Eleusinian mysteries).[162] Rather, "[r]estricting access of exegetical discussion," Whitehouse concludes, "has the effect of insulating the intense, autobiographical quality of imagistic revelations from the 'noise' or 'interference' of everyday discourse" (Whitehouse 2000, 92).

Although Mithraism was characterized by a widespread dissemination throughout the Roman Empire, its spread can be attributed to socio-political factors other than the "religious" character of the Mithraic groups themselves. Even as the mobility of Egyptian merchants and immigrants facilitated the spread of the Isis cult (Heyob 1975, 10–12), so the mobile character of the Roman military and of its civil servants, both of which dominated the demography of Mithraic membership, provided the "strings of contagion" for the spread of Mithraism (White 1990, 56, and literature cited in n. 117), a spread facilitated more by milita-

quentially ordered ritual analogues to great acts held (locally? regionally?) to have been performed by Mithras.

161 An "epidemiological" model of cultural transmission was first elaborated by Dan Sperber (1996). As summarized by McCauley and Lawson, Sperber argued that the study of macrophenomena such as culture must be explained by micro-level processes; specifically, "the nature of the human cognitive system differentially encourages the acquisition or recollection of some cultural representations as opposed to others and, therefore, that these cognitive considerations constitute selection pressures on cultural representations and, indirectly, on the cultural forms for which they are responsible" (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 40).

162 Although participation in Mithraic groups was closed to non-initiates, the location of such mithraeae as those of Crypta Balbi, San Clemente (*CIMRM* 338–48; Boyle 1987) and Santa Prisca (Vermaseren and van Essen 1965) in central Rome and the Walbrook Mithraeum in central London (Shepherd 1998), the Mithraeum of Casa di Diana in a crowded, urban *insula* in Ostia (*CIMRM* 216–23) and in such public places as the Terme di Caracalla (*CIMRM* 457) or the Mithraeum of Caesarea (Hopfe and Lease 1975), supports the contention that neither the existence of the cult nor its membership were "secret." Merkelbach has even argued that the Mithraic procession depicted on the wall of the Santa Prisca Mithraeum represented an actual procession in public (Merkelbach 1984, 180–82). The Hellenistic mystery cults generally were characterized by public as well as private aspects. The former were transformed into the latter through initiation (Martin 1987, 59)

rily and politically motivated "acts of patronage and benefaction than on patterns of conversion or recruitment" (White 1990, 57).[163] Maps portraying the density of distributed Mithraic finds, and their overlap with the deployment of the Roman military and consequent Roman bureaucratic outposts, more resemble epidemiological maps of the spread of disease than they do didactic deployments of religious doctrine.[164] For, the latter represent noncontiguous communities founded by individual missionaries who disseminated their religious teachings or beliefs wherever they had opportunity to travel (compare the maps of Paul's missionary journeys, for example), or even through their writings in the complete absence of face-to-face contact (e. g., Paul, Rom 1: 13, 15). For Mithraism, that is, as for Graeco-Roman religions in general, there were no roving apostles or missionaries who represented and transmitted an approved or orthodox set of beliefs: authority "inhered in the collective act rather than in the words of the leader" whose role was more of an iconic figurehead than one of "dynamic social strategist" (Whitehouse 1995, 153).

Although a common story would certainly be shared within any particular Mithraic cohort and some regional homogeneities may have developed among contiguous Mithraic groups (Clauss 2001, 16, 48, 71, 76), it is nevertheless unlikely that any standardized accounts of Mithraic myth or teachings circulated widely.[165] As Whitehouse concludes, "[e]ven when a set of non-verbal ritual images" does spread widely, as was the case with Mithraism, their "verbal accounts…may not" (Whitehouse 2000, 49).

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163 See the compelling scenario offered by Roger Beck for the spread of Mithraism by the military and civilian followers of the Commagenian royal house in the highly mobile context of the Judean and Civil Wars (Beck 1998, esp. 121 – 22). Studies of contemporary religious subgroups suggest that high in-group cohesion and commitment is correlate with support of the dominant society's political polity, including its enforcement through military action (Atran 2002, 120 – 21). In the large-scale empires of antiquity as in the modern industrialized world, such groups may, in part, be reactions to institutionalized social mobility (Martin 1994b, 125; Atran 2002, 121).

164 Chronologically sequenced maps of Mithraic distribution would, of course, be more helpful in establishing this point than are the available synchronic maps of Mithraic finds. Apparent deviations from the epidemiological model of Mithraic dispersion—for example, the isolated Mithraic remains on the Greek island of Andros—are explained by the transfer there of a military unit already composed of Mithraic initiates (Clauss 2001, 37).

165 By this view, the recently discovered fragment of a "Mithraic Catechism" from Egypt (Brashear 1992) would represent an example of Mithraic tradition that has been codified at the local level. The content of any such "doctrinal" developments would be, in any case, accessory to and mitigated by the dominant "imagistic" character of Mithraic communities and, like the content of Hellenistic mystery *legomena* generally, be, in and of itself, at best trivial and at worse incomprehensible (Martin 1995, 108 – 12).

The "Canonical" Image of Mithraism

In addition to the architecture of the mithraea themselves, their cave-like structure in simulation of the cosmos (Porphyry, *De Antr. Nymph.* 5–6) and the parallel *triclinia*, the only element common to all Mithraic cells was the tauroctonous image of sacrifice, a dramatic and strikingly memorable image which was, as its ubiquitous presence evinces, readily transmitted and before which initiation into the Mithraic cohort most certainly occurred. From an art historical perspective, it is composed, moreover, of Graeco-Roman artistic clichés, of sacrifice for example (Cumont 1956 [1903], 209–10); it is memorable, however, precisely because conventional expectations associated with these clichés are violated (Boyer 2001, 80–82); the sacrificer (Mithras) is depicted astride and looking away from the sacrifice (the bull, a domesticated animal), for example, and extraneous creatures, both domestic and wild, intrude into the act: a dog and serpent feed together upon the sacrificial blood flowing from the fatal wound and a scorpion is attached to the testicles of the bull while grains of wheat spring from the tip of its tail (Martin 1994a, 222–24). These unexpected elements represent, of course, signs of the zodiac and the whole composition is structured, like the architecture of the mithraeum itself, according to astrological principles (Gordon 1976, 176; Beck 1984, 2079), one of the most widespread features of Hellenistic mentality (Cumont 1960 [1912], 32).

Marino mithraeum. Photo by L. H. Martin

Apart from its ubiquitous presence at every Mithraic initiation, what is significant about this image is its dramatic construction of a common Greco-Roman ritual act according to the "celestial templates" that were such a central feature of the Graeco-Roman *mentalité* (Beck 1998, 125). As Lévi-Strauss has emphasized of symbolic representations, however, meaning does not and cannot reside in its isolated elements but, rather, in the way those elements are combined (Lévi-Strauss 1967, 206). The contents of such a construction, i. e., any mythic or doctrinal contents associated with this icon, were, however, the result of local exegesis,[166] as the "endless minor alterations" to the central icon itself, the diverse and varying side panels of the tauroctony, where they exist, and the collateral iconography and statuary of the various mithraea suggest (Campbell 1968, 4; Gordon 1976, 169; Gordon 1980; White 1990, 58; Martin 1994a, 218 – 19; Clauss 2001, 55, 76).[167] The various elements of the Mithraic tauroctony constitute, in other words, an iconic lexicon from which local meanings might be constructed according to a common celestial template shared by Mithraic culture.

In addition to providing Mithraic initiates with a cosmically "patterned screen of representations and feelings" against which local meanings might be projected (Whitehouse 2000, 30), the ubiquitous presence of the Mithraic tauroctony also provided Mithraists a mnemonic icon for their own initiatory sacrifices. Even the effects associated with vivid flashbulb memories are, however, prone to fading and decaying over time (Schacter 1996, 198). According to the model of imagistic modes of religiosity, such images are ritually cultivated for initiates and typically cast in an analogic code which evokes "multivocal and multivalent meanings" that are "simultaneously affective, sensual, and conceptual" (Whitehouse 2000, 88 – 89, *apud* Barth 1975, 1987; and Wagner 1992). In contrast to the digital coding of mental representations in semantic memory as data sequentially organized according to some implicit logic, analogically encoded mental representation would tend to "stack up in memory" to be organized by the rememberer autobiographically in accordance with such memorable episodes as his participation in ritual initiations (Malley 2001, 6), especially when

166 Dan Sperber has argued that no symbol has implicit meaning which might be decoded; rather all symbols are *viewed* as meaningful on the basis of locally improvised interpretation (Sperber 1975, xi, 85). As Clauss concludes of antiquity, people "did not feel bound by fixed credos and confessions which had to be consistent to the last detail: in the area of religion, a truly blessed anarchy held sway" (Clauss 2001, 148).

167 Even the sevenfold structure of the initiatory grades—a doctrinal centrepiece in most reconstructions of a "normative" Mithraism—has been questioned for the cult apart from its Roman-Ostian examples (Francis 1975, 441 – 42; White 1990, 58 n. 134; but see Beck 2000, 149, 171 – 72 and n. 118).

presented with persons and/or images associated with that initiation. Intense social cohesion among those who shared in that initiation is, thereby, mnemonically reinforced.[168] This mnemonic representation of loyalty was shared not only by initiates in a particular Mithraic association but was "projected" as a wider "Mithraic culture" (which, Whitehouse predicts, may occur under certain conditions, e.g., those of war, 2001, 14), that extended, finally, to the empire itself (Martin 1994a, 219; Merkelbach 1984, 153–88).

Beyond structural observations, little or no general content can be assumed for or assigned to the central tauroctonous image of Roman Mithraism. Mnemonic rehearsals of Mithraic loyalty by the exclusivist membership of Mithraic cohorts would contribute rather to the construction and solidification of local Mithraic meanings. For, having no regulatory hierarchy or orthodoxy, inventions and mutations in the "revelatory" content associated with the tauroctonous focalization would certainly have occurred in its transmission from one group to another (Clauss 2001, 171), even as "endless minor alterations" characterized the transmission of the "canonical" image itself (Gordon 1976, 169). For doctrinal religions, by contrast, no "ritual, no painting, no hymn, no statue, no altar, no posture…can be adequately understood without reference to a body of ideas codified in language" (Whitehouse 2000, 35).

Mithraism and Christianity

Mithraism has been compared to Christianity since the second century, by Justin Martyr (1 *Apol*. 66; *Dial*. 70, 78), by Tertullian (*De Bapt*. 5; *De Cor*. 15; *Adv. Marc*. 1.13; *De praescr. haeret*. 40; *Apol*. 8) and by Origen (*Cels*. 1.9; 6.21). Modern comparisons include the famous judgement by Ernst Renan in the nineteenth century that had "the growth of Christianity…been arrested by some mortal malady, the world would have been Mithraic" (Renan 1882, 579). However, Mithraism, as did other non-Christian Hellenistic religions, effectively came to an end with the political embrace of Christianity by Rome during the fourth century. This political ratification of Christianity does not adequately explain, however, the basis for its broad-based popular appeal and its acceptance as an alternative

168 Similarly, among the Nkanu of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, another group of people who traditionally encode their cultural knowledge analogically in art and who transmit this knowledge over a several month period of initiation, some of the artefacts produced during the period of initiation are retained and displayed to the community by new initiates during a one-to-two-year reintegration period (Eickel 2001; van Damme 2002).

to existing Graeco-Roman religions and philosophies in the first place (see Lease 1980).[169]

The rather rapid transmission of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire may be explained by the adoption by some of the early Christianities of what Whitehouse terms the "doctrinal" mode of religiosity which it shared, in the Hellenistic context, only with some forms of Judaism, the proselytizing transmission of which was, however, incapacitated by Roman suppression of the revolts of 66–70 and 132–35 CE.[170] The foundation for what later developed as the Christian mode of doctrinal orthodoxy was first articulated by Paul with his insistence that salvation is not to be obtained through ritual practices but by faith (Rom. 1: 16, 17; 3: 26, 28, 30, etc.). The "doctrinal" character of this "faith" is nowhere more clearly expressed than in Paul's opposition to the "charismatic" exercises of the Christian community in Corinth (1 Cor. 12). Paul insisted that such spiritual practices, and especially glossolalia, be regulated by reasoned interpretation (1 Cor. 14: 5, 13–15).[171] And he leaves little doubt that it is his own authority which is the criterion for a correct, universal interpretation to which local revelations associated with such practices as glossolalia should yield; for his teachings are, he avers, themselves "a command of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14: 37). "If any one does not recognize this," he concludes, "he is not recognized" (1 Cor. 14: 38; see also Gal. 1: 6–9).

The universalistic but authorized strategy advocated by Paul "only made sense once the capacity for conceptualizing large anonymous communities had been established" (Whitehouse 2000, 41). As is characteristic of the doctrinal mode of religions generally, the dynamic and centralized leadership advocated by Paul tended to suppress alternative imagistic modes of Hellenistic religiosity, both Christian and non-Christian, by de-emphasizing the importance of local

169 For a plausible mathematically-based explanation for the rapid growth of Christianity and estimate of the Christian population of the Roman Empire by the time of Constantine, see Stark 1996, 4–13.

170 The Greek philosophical "schools" must be counted among the contributors to the beginnings of a doctrinal mode of religiosity in the Hellenistic world, although they were never "centralized" and "routinized" in the sense described by Whitehouse (on the philosophical "schools" see Frischer 1982; Braun, 2004).

171 In 1 Corinthians 14 alone, Paul contrasts *pneuma* ("spirit"; representative insights and feelings characteristic of one's inner life) and "charismatic practice" of *glōssais lalōn* (uninterpreted "speaking in tongues") with *nous* (the "thinking mind" or "intellect"), *diermēneia* ("interpretation" or "explanation"), *oikodomē* ("edification") and *katēchēsis* ("instruction" by word of mouth)—precisely the sorts of features characteristic of diverging tendencies towards the "imagistic" and "doctrinal" modes of religiosity predicted by Whitehouse's theory.

exegesis and ritual fervour (Whitehouse 2000, 2).[172] Such uniformity of doctrine is maintained by frequent review and repetition, expressed in language, whether orally or in writing[173]—just those traits typically associated with the transmissive advantages of such proselytizing communities as those associated with the Pauline (and Lukan) traditions and with their stable and enduring but imagined or anonymous continuities (Whitehouse 2000, 9; on anonymous communities, see Anderson 1991, 6; see also the claim to exclusivity in Mark 13: 6).

Conclusion

Should the theoretical validity of the two "modes of religiosity" proposed by Whitehouse be established, we might expect that there will be differential relationships between discursive and non-discursive types of ritual practice, be-

172 Indications that other pre- or non-Pauline Christian groups may have shared an imagistic mode of religiosity with their Hellenistic religious context are the collections of local "aphorisms" and "picturesque images" ascribed to Jesus in Q and in the *Gospel of Thomas* (Mack 1993, 105; on the "local" character of these sayings, see Arnal 2001)—one of which becomes incorporated into the more "orthodox" gospel narratives, the other becoming judged as "gnostic" and thereby "heretical," or the vividly imagistic but non-doctrinal character of "gnostic" myth generally (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.18.1). The archaeological evidence for pre-Constantinian Christianity collected by Snyder (1985) supports the continuing existence of an imagistic modality, alternative to the written/doctrinal tradition, among many Christian groups into the early fourth century (and beyond) when the doctrinal tradition achieved authoritative status as the dominant mode of Christian self-understanding and hegemonic expression. Eastern Orthodox Christianity, rooted in Hellenic culture, continues to exhibit a strong imagistic tendency as do popular traditions in Roman Catholicism.

173 In literate cultures, writing, a mnemonic aid for semantic memory, is associated with the doctrinal mode. Jewish groups, for example, had long employed writing to preserve their epic narratives and their doctrinal propositions. Some groups in the literate cultural context of the Graeco-Roman world may have retained a largely imagistic mode of representation, however, by adopting texts into their practices as iconic objects rather than as media for the transmission of doctrine, e. g., the "books written with unknown characters" that were displayed during Isiac initiation rites (Apuleius, *Met*. 11.22) or the often nonsensical but visually patterned incantations familiar from the Graeco-Roman magical texts. Since episodic and semantic memory are both universal capacities of primate, including human, cognition—in the sense that physiology is common to a particular species—such "mixed-modes" of religiosity are more often to be expected than more or less ideal instantiations of either. As Whitehouse has warned: "Even the most iconoclastic doctrinal traditions incorporate certain properties of the imagistic mode and vice-versa, not least because doctrines themselves may evoke multivocal imagery and because ritual symbolism is often crucially augmented by doctrine-like discourse" (Whitehouse 2000, 1, extended discussion, 147–85).

tween the particular memory systems activated by these differing types of performance, and a consequent differential patterning of socio-political association. This theoretical prediction is historically instantiated by the parallel rise of Mithraism and Christianity, which were, however, cognitively encoded and transmitted in contrasting ways. The early successes of Christianity with respect to Mithraism can, in other words, be explained more on the basis of its selected mode of representation and strategy of transmission than by the content of its message (Whitehouse 2000, 80). The latter is, after all, largely shared with Mithraism as well as with many features of the mystery cults in general—the product of a common cultural context and contemporaneous cultural concerns (for example, J. Z. Smith 1990, esp. 166–43)—as has been observed throughout the ages. As Whitehouse contends, "control of the social conditions of transmission is always more important than determining the range of textual materials that should be regarded as authoritative" (Whitehouse 2000, 177). This conclusion was demonstrated, of course, by the growing power of a centralized "orthodox" Christianity and its condemnation of "deviant" forms of Christianity as heretical—whether those forms were characterized by imagistic practice and/or by doctrinal nonconformity (Martin 2004).

The historical case of Mithraism also supports the suggestion that cognitive models, such as that proposed by Whitehouse, provides a valid social-scientific heuristic for the (re)construction of historical knowledge. Given the incomplete data that survive from Roman Mithraism, like that from the historical or archaeological record generally, the sociologist Rodney Stark has suggested that well-articulated social-scientific models—"including formal rational choice theory, [economic] theories of the firm, the role of social networks and interpersonal attachments in conversion, dynamic population models, social epidemiology, and modes of religious economies"—might be employed to "fill in the blanks" of what we know about the religions of antiquity (Stark 1996, xii, 23). The question, of course—and it is raised by Stark of his own proposals as well as by his critics[174]—is to what extent "it is possible…to apply propositions developed in one time and place to other eras and cultures" (Stark 1996, 21).[175] The appealing

174 For example, Hock 1986, cited and responded to by Stark 1996, 21–22; see also McCutcheon 1999.

175 As summarized by Wayne Meeks: "The perceptions and attitudes about change which we take for granted in modern industrial societies are in almost every case inappropriate to the conditions of Graeco-Roman society. Neither the extreme individualism that is the presupposition of the lore and practice of personal advancement in industrial democracies nor the class structure essential to conventional Marxist analysis has a place in the ancient Mediterranean world" (Meeks 1983, 20; see also Kiser and Hechter 1991).

feature of Whitehouse's model is that it incorporates but goes beyond the familiar metaphors, typologies and sets of concepts previously developed on the basis of ethnographic, historical and sociological descriptions (Whitehouse 1995, 203–17; 2000, 3–4) to advance a theoretical explanation grounded in common features of human cognition and which offers, thereby, a trans-cultural and trans-historical premise for the organization and interpretation of all human products and their historical remains (Whitehouse 2000, 11; see Stark 1996, 25–26).

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20. Cognitive Science, Ritual, and the Hellenistic Mystery Religions

The most commonly attributed characteristic of ritual, whether understood as paradigmatic act or as social praxis (Bell 1992), is repetition (Bell 1992, 91–92). Consequently, many considerations of ritual have questioned the difference between this iterative behavior and certain forms of pathology, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (Freud 1959 [1907], as well from more benign forms of routinized and habitualized human behavior (Boyer and Liénard 2006). From the perspective of the cognitive science of religion, however, much of which has focused specifically on ritual (Whitehouse 1995; 2000; 2004; Lawson and McCauley1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002),[176] more similarities than differences have been proposed among such behaviors, with legitimating claims to the authority of superhuman agency most often given as the distinguishing characteristic of *religious* rituals (Lawson and McCauley 1990; Smith 1995).[177] In this article, however, I should like to consider the characteristic of a number of religious rituals that often remains unnoted, namely, their irregular or infrequent performance, at least for the ritual subject who participates in such rituals only once or, at most, occasionally—funerals, for example, or marriage. Even those presiding over such infrequently performed rituals, as well as attending onlookers, will have fewer occasions to attend such rituals than regularly repeated rituals such as those embedded in monthly, weekly, or even daily religious observances. One example of a one-off or infrequently performed ritual, for the ritual subject as for the presider and attending participants, is the initiation rites that have been documented throughout all human societies. In the following, I should like to suggest the utility of two cognitively based theories of ritual for an understanding of these two types of ritual and for their relationship, that of divergent modes of religiosity proposed by Harvey Whitehouse (1995; 2000; 2004), and the ritual competence theory of Thomas Lawson and Robert

176 Curiously, evolutionary psychologists, who provide an explanatory framework often appealed to by cognitive scientists, neglect the issue of ritual. For example, the recently published *Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (Buss 2005) has no formal entry for 'ritual' nor is the word even indexed.

177 While claims to superhuman agency represent a necessary condition for distinguishing between 'religious' and 'non-religious' systems (such as Freudianism or Marxism), it is not sufficient for a definition of religion, e.g., for explaining preferences for some forms of superhuman agency over others. This latter condition is often attributed to the 'costliness' of the preferred claim (e.g., Scott Atran 2002), 114–146), a computation of value to which more attention need be directed.

McCauley (1990) and their subsequent ritual form hypotheses (McCauley and Lawson 2002). And I would like to exemplify this utility with respect to the popular appeal of the mystery religions in the Roman Empire.

Divergent Modes of Religiosity: Rome and the Hellenistic Mysteries

Whitehouse, a cognitive anthropologist, has identified two divergent modes of religiosity, which he terms "doctrinal" and "imagistic." The doctrinal modality is, in his analysis, not to be confused with religions which maintain beliefs or teachings, a characteristic of most if not all religious traditions. Nor is the imagistic modality of religiosity to be confused with religions in which images are to be found, again a characteristic of most if not all religious traditions. Rather, these divergent modes of religiosity are characterized by an interrelationship among and interdependency of multiple variables that include alternative ways by which religious knowledge is processed and encoded, and the ways by which recall and transmission of this knowledge is constrained by different systems of memory (Whitehouse 1995, 197; Whitehouse 2002). Since recollections are not accurate representations of actual occurrences but are reconstructions based upon the way in which they have been encoded (LeDoux 2002, 97), they are influenced by and, in turn, influence the ways in which their patterns of distribution are determined over time.

The fundamental cognitive function that underlies the divergence of religious modalities is memory. The doctrinal modality refers to those traditions in which knowledge is expressed in syntactic or sequential form as a coherent set of practices, whether those practices are ideational (e. g., doctrinal) or non-ideational (e. g., ritual) in which significance is, nevertheless, cued to idealtional meaning. These doctrinal practices become encoded in the semantic memory of its practitioners through countless iterations and reiterations and, which, over time, achieve historical stability. If a hierarchical leadership and centralized structure is developed to maintain and to control such doctrines and/or practices, such standardized sets of officially sanctioned and transmitted schemas (orthodoxy) and scripts (orthopraxy) can become the basis for large-scale, if anonymous, communities.[178]

178 'Schema' is a generic term for cognitive templates that is sometimes used to designate conceptual in contrast to action templates. 'Script' is a term generally used by cognitive scientists to designate cognitive templates for sequences of action (Brewer 1999, 720).

This reiterative process of codification would seem to apply well to the sacrificial rites that were central to all Roman religion (Griffith 2009). Thus, by the first century C.E., Pliny the Elder could refer to these official Roman ritual practices as "fixed and formal" (Plin. *Nat*. 28.11), and the Roman historian Valerius Maximus could confirm that these practices were strictly controlled by the *pontifices* (Val. Max. 1.1.1a-b). Such historically scripted and officially controlled practices are readily replicable and, consequently, were easily able to be widely distributed, not only over time but throughout the Roman Empire.

In contrast to the routinized repetitions of Roman sacrificial orthopraxy, what we know of the Hellenistic mystery religions conforms to the variables of the imagistic mode of religiosity (Martin 2005a; 2005b). This modality refers to paratactic or analogical (rather than syntactic or sequential) representations of knowledge, which are evoked and transmitted through infrequently performed but emotionally salient ritual pageantry. Such emotionally laden knowledge is typically encoded in the episodic memory system to be recalled and interpreted in the autobiographical frame of the ritual subject (Tulving 1999, 278 – 280). The dramatic if infrequent rites of initiation, characteristic of the mysteries, provided a compensatory alternative to the routinized ritual form of traditional Roman ritual practices (Gragg 2004, 69 – 86) and contributed to the spread of these mysteries throughout the Roman Empire from the first century C.E.—precisely the period during which Roman ritual practices were being officially stabilized under pontifical control.

Rituals in the Mystery Religions

Initiation into the Hellenistic mysteries took place, for the initiate, but once per initiatory grade, three, for example, in the Eleusinian mysteries (Plut. *Demetr.* 26), two in those of Isis (Apul. *Met*. 11), and up to seven in the Roman cult of Mithras (Jerome *Ep.* 107 *ad Laetam*). The enigmatic and terrifying ordeals characteristic of these initiations would have produced cognitive disorientation among the individual initiates which would have mitigated against their learning any coherent set of shared teachings. Such cognitive perplexity could, however, have resulted in personal constructions of analogies, especially given initiatory anticipations which had been primed during preparations for the ritual (fasting, purification, drugs, etc.) (Martin 2005a).[179] While the mysteries never developed any broad

179 'Priming' is a term employed by cognitive scientists to refer to 'the [mnemonic] ability to identify or produce an item...as a result of a specific prior encounter with the item' (Buckner

doctrinal coherence or canonical writings, attendance by initiates at subsequent initiations of new members would have allowed for a certain consolidation of religious knowledge within each mystery cell. Although this knowledge may have been structured by certain broad themes or norms associated with cult identity and characteristics of its patron deity, this knowledge seems to have remained substantially local since no centralized form of administration was ever developed among the mystery religions to organize, stabilize and control its possible content (Beck 2000, 172), nor, to our knowledge, was any ever proposed. As McCauley and Lawson have observed, "[w]hen non-linguistic...representations [i.e., analogies] play...a central role in the transmission of cultural knowledge," any "faithful replication of that knowledge" can be questioned (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 38). However, the anthropologist Fredrik Barth has suggested that while such non-linguistic knowledge cannot be reduced to "unambiguous proposition form," it may be transmitted as "broad themes" (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 67; Barth 1975, 211; Barth 1987) precisely the case Roger Beck has argued for Mithraism (2000, 172).

Although any definitively formulated knowledge among fellow initiates likely remained elusive, a strong sense of group solidarity would have been produced among them since episodic recall emphasizes details of time and place surrounding those who have together experienced some dramatic event (Tulving 1999, 278). A fictive sense of "kinship," common to Roman social organization generally (Gager 1996), was forged, thereby, precisely out of the absence of any extrinsic system of knowledge and resulted in a perseverance of the mysteries as small, autonomous, face-to-face associations (Martin 1997).

In addition to their (likely) presence at (some of) the initiation rites for new members, participants in the mysteries commonly shared meals of fellowship, as did social groups in the Graeco-Roman world generally (Seland 1996, 56 – 61, 74 – 83). Whereas the form and consequence of initiatory rites into the Graeco-Roman mysteries conform to the predictions of the Whitehouse modes theory concerning "imagistic" modalities, the role of these communal meals remains obscure. Were they simply social? or were they, in some sense or other sacrificial? sacramental? The meal that was engaged in by initiates into the Roman cult of Mithras offers an enticing example.

It is clear that meals were essential to Mithraic practice. Every *mithraeum* (Mithraic temple) was designed as a *triclineum*, a dining room, with dining couches along the two side walls and the tauroctonous representation of Mithras

2000, 822; see also Schacter and Curran 2000, 830), making such items ready for access (Hogan 2003, 18).

presiding as host from the place of honor on the third, rear wall. Further, some Mithraic iconography portrays Mithras sharing a meal with Sol while sitting on the hide of a bull—presumably the bull that is portrayed as being slain in the tauroctonous scene—while other imagery portray members of the community simply sharing a meal. Since the modes theory emphasizes ritual divergence, we might consider the role of the Mithraic meal from the perspective of a second pioneering cognitive theory of ritual, that of Lawson and McCauley, who specifically address the relationship of different rituals within a common ritual system (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002; cf. Martin 2004, 245–263).

In their theory of ritual competence, Lawson and McCauley have characterised initiation rites—in ways complementary to the modes theory—as "special agent rituals," a class of ritual action in which the deity, or an authorised ritual agent of the deity, is represented as the actor. Based upon a tacit feature of human cognition by which ordinary agents and actions are represented but which, in religious rituals, are "violated" to include representations of superhuman agents in the actions performed (Boyer 2001, 51–91), Lawson and McCauley differentiate these "special agent rituals" from "special patient rituals," rituals in which the deities are represented as recipients of the action (Lawson and McCauley 1990, ii, 9). It is not only the representation of the superhuman agent's role as actor or as recipient of the action that is significant for Lawson and McCauley but also the representation of that agent's immediacy in the ritual, whatever the role, that predicts the comparative centrality of any ritual in a ritual system.

However important the Mithraic meal, its "ritually mediated connection" to Mithras was apparently less immediate than was the case with initiation. By contrast to what Lawson and McCauley term the "super-permanent" change in status wrought by special-agent rituals like initiation, the repetition of some rituals indicate that they carry comparatively less finality than do initiations and are, therefore, "ritually less-well-connected" to the superhuman agent—whatever conceptual significance might have been attributed them by the various Mithraic cells (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 31).[180] Lawson's and McCauley's hypotheses predict that such repeated rituals become, as a consequence, more routinized than special agent rituals (e.g., initiation) and that they involve comparatively less pageantry—and this seems fairly to characterize the Mithraic meals. Nevertheless, the repeated participation in these meals by members of individual Mi-

180 Lawson's and McCauley's religious ritual form hypotheses addresses the formal structure of rituals and predicts, therefore nothing of their semantic, i.e., their historical contents, (cf. McCauley and Lawson 2002, 9–10).

thraic cells would provide an occasion for the expression of their solidarity and a further possibility for consolidating local knowledge.

We can conclude that Mithraic rituals commonly included both infrequently performed special agent rituals (initiation) and repeated practices (the meal). If the meals were considered ritual—and given the construction of every known *mithraeum* as a *triclineum*, this seems probable—the meal would have been a special patient ritual. Whereas the meal was significant for the Mithraic ritual system, the special agent rite of initiation nevertheless remained central. According to Lawson and McCauley, the stability of a system in which there is a bias towards one type of ritual form over the other, will be precarious even if widespread (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 198). A "balanced" ritual system, on the other hand, contributes to the stability and survival of religious systems. The balance, even if one-sided, between the central rite of initiation and the less significant meal within the Mithraic ritual system offers one explanation for the widely distributed, three hundred-year perseverance of this new Roman religion.

Early Christian Rituals

Whereas Mithraism offered a balance between its initiation rite and its ritual meal, the meal nevertheless seems to have been understood only with reference to the membership conferred during rites of initiation, that ritual in which the immediacy of the superhuman agent was most clearly represented. The precise association of the superhuman agent to the shared meal in Mithraism remains unclear and was subject, perhaps, to local variation. On the other hand, the representation of superhuman immediacy among the first-century Christianities (i.e., Christ) shifted by the fourth century from their rites of initiation (baptism) to their shared meal (Martin 2009).

The initial appeal of virtually all the early Christianities seems to have been associated—like that of the Mystery cults—with dramatic rites of initiation. While it may be somewhat venturesome to compare Christian baptism with the ordeals associated with initiation into the mysteries, most of the early Christianities referenced their baptismal practices to the strikingly undomesticated desert practices of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:1–17; Mk. 1:2–11; Lk. 3:1–22; *Q:* Mt. 3: 7–10// Lk. 3:7–9; *Gos. Thom.* 46, Jn 1:15–34; and see Snyder 2003, 77, 111–122 for representations from early Christian material culture). At the end of the second century, Tertullian could still compare Christian baptismal practices with the dramatic rites of Mithraic initiation (Tert., *Bapt.* 5; *Praescr.* 40).

By the fourth century, however, a view of the immediate presence of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist displaced that presence (comparatively) from

baptism. This founding and initiatory act of Jesus was increasingly distanced from contemporaneous practice by an ever-lengthening succession of authorised ritual agents as well as being deflated by the increasing dominance of infant over adult baptism. With the "doctrine of the real presence" (e. g., Cyril of Jerusalem *Cat.* 19.7; 22.1–3, 6, 9), the Christian meal came to be understood as sacrificial rather than fellowship, with Jesus also representing, through his sacrificed body and blood, the initial appearance of the superhuman agent in its structural description (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 118). Because of this postulated immediacy of the superhuman agent in the Christian meal, the Eucharist became a repeated, special agent ritual with comparatively higher pageantry than baptism and considered, therefore, more central to Catholic ritual practice than baptism (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 34). This balance of repeated participation in an emotionally laden ritual, stabilized by the conceptual control of doctrinal formulation with hierarchical oversight, ensured a cognitively based, and institutionally exploited, advantage for the spread of Christianity over the alternative mystery associations (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 181–182). The view of the Eucharist as a regularly repeated sacrifice, in turn, redefined the Christian meal in a way consonant with the official Roman religious system and contributed, consequently, to one Roman emperor's acceptance of Christianity as a licit religion of Rome in the early fourth century and another's interdiction of all non-Christian religions by the end of that same century.

Conclusion

With this brief summary of some of my preliminary studies of ritual practices among the Graeco-Roman religions, I hope to arouse interest in further explorations into the possible utility of cognitive theorizing for the historical study of religions. Although explanatory particulars of the cognitive paradigm remain contested, utility has often been discovered and usefully exploited in the history of knowledge prior to conclusive confirmations. Of course, the utility of any general theory for explaining and interpreting a given historical situation must be adjusted to account for variables predicted by that theory but which may be absent from or peculiar to that situation. For example, Whitehouse's theory of divergent modes of religiosity predicts that the spread of small-scale social organizations characteristic of imagistic modalities will be "slow" and "inefficient" (Whitehouse 2000, 309), whereas Mithraic associations spread rapidly and efficiently throughout the Roman Empire. This apparent counterexample has led some scholars to conclude that this aspect of Mithraism, at least, is characteristic of the doctrinal modality (Beck 2004, 97, but see 99). This spread, however,

seems not to have been the consequence of any religious dynamics of Mithraic cult but that of the rather significant mobility characteristic of Roman society generally—particularly governmental missions by civil servants and deployments of military personnel which constituted much of the membership of these associations. Similarly, the cult of Isis was not spread as a consequence of any religious dynamics associated with that cult but by Egyptian merchants under Roman conditions of expanded commerce. Such social mobility was not, however, a characteristic of the traditional New Guinean cultures in terms of which Whitehouse initially formulated his theory (Whitehouse 1995).[181] Consequently, the variables upon which his theory is predicated must be adjusted accordingly if it to be useful for understanding the religious situation of the Roman Empire.

I do not intend to suggest that a cognitive approach to the history of religions should replace traditional historiographical and comparative methods, or that the latter should somehow be reduced to the former. Rather, I think that a cognitive approach—a research program concerned with how human minds work, how they produce the kinds cultural artifacts that they do, how they transmit (or ignore) these artifacts—should, if successful, be of paramount interest to historians. Cognitive theorising can, in other words, provide a supplement to traditional methods of historians and comparativists, and, when warranted, a corrective to their assumptions and interpretations of the historical or ethnographic "mind." The broad, cross-cultural range of knowledge controlled by historians and comparativists of religion can, on the other hand, not only assess the predictions of cognitive theorizing with examples and counter-examples but can also provide a check on the often naive and parochial assumptions of cognitive scientists' views of "religion" in their research designs. The result of such collaborative work might result in a truly scientific study of religion.

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181 Whitehouse's initial formulation of the variable associated with spread in the imagistic modality—by "group action only" rather than by "proselytization" (Whitehouse 1995, 197)—more closely approximates what we know of the ways in which Mithraic cults became disseminated (Clauss 2001, 34–37).

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21. Why Christianity Was Accepted by Romans but Not by Rome

When, some fifty years ago, Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed a science of culture (Lévi-Strauss 1967, 55), he famously argued that cultures are the products of and, consequently, reflect the structures of the human mind (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 90; Leach 1974, 2, 22). These structures, in turn, are based in the structures of the brain rather than upon, as Lévi-Strauss put it, any "inert product of the action of the environment upon an amorphous consciousness" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 90; see also 1963, 96; 1969, 75; Leach 1974, 54, 59; Gardner 1981, 133, 161). However, in contrast to the structures of the brain, which were just beginning to be explored, (Leach 1974, 23), Lévi-Strauss focused upon the expressions of mental structures, which he attempted to deduce from their mythological, cultural and behavioral evidence. More recently, neuro- and cognitive scientists have been seeking to map the fundamental structures of the human brain itself and how they function to structure mental representations as well as cultural expressions. Focusing primarily upon universally evolved mechanisms for the individual production and transmission of mental representations, these scientists have recognized but generally paid less attention to the ways by which natural processes of cognition also operate to impose a degree of stability on particular configurations of mental representations. It is the historicizing mechanisms of natural cognitive processes, such as the functions of semantic memory in the retention of rehearsed scripts and schemata, that tend to fix traditions in their localized and historical particularity in ways that are resistant to change.[182] Historians, on the other hand, have emphasized the particularity of historical formations while neglecting—even rejecting—the growing bodies of evidence that establish universal functions of the human brain as themselves among the material causes for these formations.

In his review of a new book that explores the still developing field of the cognitive science of religion, Michael Stausberg concludes that "[o]ne of the (several) reasons why many scholars (still) tend to be critical towards the cognitive paradigm is that they feel it doesn't help them to do something with their data" (Stausberg 2005, 151). Other historians of religion have expressed similar reservations about my own tentative contributions to this field (Gasparro 2004, 241). As a historian, I agree with these concerns, although it is perhaps ad-

182 "Script" is a term generally used by cognitive scientists to designate cognitive templates for sequences of action; "Schema" is a generic term for cognitive templates that is sometimes used to designate conceptual in contrast to action templates (Brewer 1999, 720).

visable, as with any new framework for research, historical or otherwise, clearly to formulate that framework theoretically before rushing into its application. On the other hand, the confirmation—or falsification—of all predictive hypotheses must be assessed against the empirical evidence to which they are applied, in the case of this paper, to some of the historical materials of early Christianity.

At this stage in the process of developing the relevance of cognitive scientific theorizing for historiographical method, I appeal to what Hans Jonas, in his application of phenomenological philosophy to the study of gnosticism, termed research in an "experimental vein" (Jonas 1963, 320). Of course, many of Jonas' conclusions proved, in light of subsequent research, to be misleading, even incorrect, as well might those informed by cognitive theorizing. Nevertheless, the impact of the insightful questions posed by Jonas' experimental boldness and the issues it raised still resonate in contemporary scholarship (Williams 1996, 54).

Why did Rome reject Christianity?

Among the most religiously tolerant of ancient empires (MacMullen 1981, 2), the Roman State nevertheless rejected the early Christianities. The usual reason given by official Rome—as by subsequent historians—for this opposition was political. But why political?

i. Political concerns

Large-scale groups and abstract institutions, such as those represented by empires like Rome are, in terms of evolutionary time, very recent developments (Boyer 2001, 250). Rather, human brains evolved to process social information in the context of small-scale societies (Martin 2004). When large-scale societies did develop, people nevertheless still tended to cluster in face-to-face "solidarity-based groups" (Boyer 2001, 249). Even contemporary America continues to be rife with what Alexis de Tocqueville, that nineteenth-century French ethnographer of the United States, first described as "secondary associations" (de Tocqueville 1900, II.2.5.). Arguments have been made that the size of such groups is constrained by the information-processing capacities of human brains (Dunbar 1993) and by those of short-term memory (D'Andrade 1995, 42–44). It would seem, consequently, that small, face-to-face associations represent an evolutionary optimum for sociopolitical organization by *Homo sapiens* (Tiger and Fox 1971, 238–239; Willhoite 1981, 251). Rather, it is the development and persever-

ance of large-scale kingdoms and empires that are, relative to the biocognitive optimum for social size, precarious and that require defense. That defense has been termed, since Aristotle, "politics" (Arist. *Pol.* 1.1). And political rule, if successful, must defend itself against evolved dispositions of the ruled concerning optimum group size (Martin 2004). For Rome, in other words, the small-scale communities of early Christians, *by their very existence*, represented a potential threat to the state (Pliny *Ep.* 10. 34).

As is well known, the earliest documented proceedings to determine the political loyalty of Christians to the Roman State were heard by Pliny the Younger. Trajan had appointed Pliny in 109 or 110 AD as his *legatus augusti* to Bithynia-Pontus with the charge of reviving the economy of this eastern province (Arnaoutoglou 2002, 38). He served in this position for two years before returning to Rome. Pliny's juridical hearings concerning the Christians of Pontus resulted in his famous "test" that required Christians and suspected Christians to sacrifice to the emperor Trajan as well as to the Capitoline gods—Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva—as pledge of their loyalty to the state (Pliny *Ep*. 10.96.5; Sherwin-White 1966, 701; Wilken 1984, 25). Given their refusal to do so, Pliny—and Roman authorities generally—could only have concluded that Christian associations were *collegia* or clubs organized for *political* purposes, or at least as associations having a potential for disrupting political, including economic, affairs. The existence of such associations, restricted by Rome since late Republican times, had, since 7 AD, been required to have either senatorial or imperial sanction (Stevenson 1970). Trajan, it should be noted, had explicitly—though not outrightly—prohibited the formation of such clubs, especially in the province of Bithynia-Pontus (Pliny *Ep.* 10.34; Arnaoutoglou 2002, 35–36, 37–39), possibly in response to violent riots in the province a few years earlier (Arnaoutoglou 2002, 38).

But there seems to have been a more fundamental issue at stake in Rome's opposition to Christians than simply perceptions of their problematic loyalty.

ii. Religious concerns

The charges against the Christians of Pontus seem to have been brought by civic priests who were annoyed that their temples "had been almost entirely deserted for a long time" and by merchants of sacrificial meat who were perturbed that "scarcely anyone could [any longer] be found to buy the flesh of [their] sacrificial victims" (Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.10; Sherwin-White 1966, 697, 700, 778; Wilken 1984, 15). The inference from Pliny's account is that this decline in the "sacred rites" of the "temples" (Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.10) could indeed be attributed to Christian practices of assembling for meals at which "food of an ordinary and harmless kind" (*cibus*

promiscuum…et innoxium) was served (Pliny *Ep*. 10.96.7). In the context of the charges being considered, and in that of Pliny's letter, the composition of a master rhetorician (Sherwin-White 1966, 1–11; Wilken 1984, 2–3), reference to the Christian's consumption of an "ordinary and harmless" fare could only be in contrast to the consumption of sacrificial flesh, the declines in which so worried the local priests and merchants. Indeed, several decades before Pliny's hearing, the Christians of Pontus (among others) had been exhorted, in a letter that has come down to us as the *First Letter of Peter*, to practice *spiritual* (*pneumatikai*) rather than fleshly sacrifices (*sarkikai thusiai*) (I Pet. 2.5). Likewise, the *Letter to the Hebrews*, authored at about the same time as *I Peter*, contains a sustained argument for the end of all Christian sacrificial practices, based on the view that Christ was the once-and-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 9.15–10.18). Numerous addressees have been suggested for this anonymous letter (Attridge 1989, 9–10), one of which, it might be noted, are the Christian communities of Bithynia and Pontus (Bengel 1864 [1742], 2, 571).

Of course, any consideration of Christian impact upon public observances of official religion in Pontus and upon fluctuations in related market forces would have depended upon the size and influence of the Christian community in this province. We have, however, no contemporaneous information about that community apart from Pliny's report—although, some seventy years later, Lucian of Samosata referred to the province as being "full of Christians and atheists" (Lucian *Alex*. 25). That Pliny concludes that declines of animal sacrifice and in the consumption of sacrificial meat in Pontus did have to do with the absence, indeed the rejection, of such practices by Christians, seems clear from his disposition of the situation.

Pliny's view of the Pontusian Christians as associations lacking sacrificial practices may have been influenced by, and even confirmed by, his knowledge of Christian practices in Rome where he had spent all of his life before accepting his position as *legatus* in Bithynia-Pontus. It is significant that none of the surviving material evidence for pre-Constantinian Christianity, most of which is from the catacombs of Rome, contain *any* representations of sacrificial imagery. Rather than depictions of Jesus as suffering and dying, for example, or as sacrificed and risen, these funerary data portray Jesus as a wise and heroic teacher, representations of Jesus most closely related to those from such early literary remains as *Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*. And the meals portrayed in these Christian material data are not the sacrificial meals of bread and wine but the *agape* meals of bread and fishes (Snyder 2003), non-sacrificed and non-sacrificial fare that might well be characterized by Roman observers as "ordinary and harmless." As Robert Wilken has concluded, Christians generally "stood apart" "from the

other nations inhabiting the Mediterranean world," "[a]ll [of which] practiced some form of animal sacrifice" (Wilken 1984, 189).

Sacrifice was, of course, the central feature of all Roman religion, from domestic practices to those of the collegial association to public state rites (Beard *et al*. 1998, 36; Turcan 2000, 103)—as it was of the Greeks before them (Burkert 1972, 182). These rites came to embody the values of "Romanness" (Turcan 1996, 195), and, through countless repetitions over hundreds of years, codified these values into the semantic memory of its practitioners until they became standardized as an officially sanctioned set of scripts.

The underlying principle of sacrifice, famously characterized as that of *do ut des* ("I give in order that you shall give"), embodies an evolved principle of mutual altruism that is observable even among primates (Burkert 1996, 129–155). This principle of reciprocity depends, in turn, upon our capacity for sociality. Cognitivists refer to this capacity as "theory of mind," the ability to ascribe mental states, like the ones we have, to others and, consequently, to understand the world from their point of view. Significantly, an inability to do so is one of the symptoms of autism, and autistic individuals are unable to relate to such abstract agents such as gods, and, consequently are often devoid of religious beliefs (Atran 2002, 193–195; Baron-Cohen 1995).

Cognitive processes such as mutual altruism and principles of reciprocity, which underlie and structure religious practices of sacrifice, are essential also to negotiated alliances between small-scale societies in the construction of large-scale political groups. When the Roman State sought to curtail or to control small-scale formations, therefore, it is not surprising that it focused on, among other things, their sacrificial practices. When, for example, the cult of Cybele was accepted into Rome in 205 BC, as advised by the Sibylline and confirmed by the Delphic oracles, the Senate stipulated that her eunuch priests be confined to her temple enclosure on the Palatine and forbade males among the Roman citizenry from themselves engaging in any priestly sacrifice (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 2.19.305). Similarly, in connection with reported excesses associated with the celebration of the Bacchanalia in Rome, the Senate, some twenty years later (186 BCE) disallowed Dionysian groups, among other things, their office of *magister sacrorum* (master of sacrifice) (Livy 39.18). Whereas the practice of sacrifice was forbidden to the worshipers of Cybele and Dionysus because of their perceived excesses, the Christian rejection of sacrifice perplexed the Romans.

Not only did Pliny view the Christian associations as *hetaeriae,* as potentially subversive political organizations (Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96.7), as the second century BC Dionysian groups had been viewed, but, given their absence of any sacrificial

practices, also judged as *superstitiones*, as not religious at all (Plin. *Ep*. 10.69.8; Suet. *Ner*. 16.2; Tac. *Ann*. 15.44.5)—in the later view of Lucian, as atheists.

Why did Christianity appeal to Romans?

More difficult is the question of Christian appeal to ordinary Roman citizens. Notwithstanding the official status of Christian groups as suspect—even illegal—political associations, and despite official doubts about the authenticity of their religiosity, a significant number of ordinary Romans—a majority, some have argued (Stark 1996, 10–11)—seem to have accepted some form of Christianity before the beginning of the fourth century. Of course, much, if not all of the widespread dissemination of religions during the Hellenistic period can be attributed to non-religious factors, that is, to the dramatically expanded opportunities of mobility, especially among merchants, who were instrumental in disseminating the cult of Isis, for example—a model for the spread of Christianity suggested by that traveling tradesman, Paul of Tarsus (Meeks 1983, 16–23, 29). Rodney Stark has described this exponential growth of Christianity arithmetically (Stark 1996, 4–21) and concluded that its appeal was not so much its teachings or beliefs but rather such collective efforts as their charitable works. But what was the *initial* attraction of the early Christianities to individual Romans that allowed for a sufficient number of members to be recruited in order to develop and support their various charitable networks in the first place?

i. Baptism as initiation rite

In contrast to the sacrificial practices that were central to official Roman religion, the one practice universally characteristic of all the early Christianities was that of baptism. This practice is documented not only from the synoptic gospels (Mt. 3: 1–17; Mk. 1: 2–11; Lk. 3:1–22) and Acts (Acts 2: 38–41) but also from *Q* (Mt. 3: 7–10//Lk. 3: 7–9), one of the sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, from the gospels of John (Jn. 1: 15–34) and Thomas (GTh 46), the epistles of Paul (I Cor. 12:13), the Jewish-Christian *Gospel of the Ebionites*, as well as in representations from early Christian material culture (Snyder 2003, 77, 111–122). Whatever creedal significance the various groups of early Christians may have attributed this rite, if any, it seemed to have functioned for them all as a rite of initiation (Thomassen 2003).

The cognitive anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse has described initiation rites generally as a medium whereby some traditions transmit their religious

knowledge (for the following, Whitehouse 2004). He predicts that for these traditions, initiations will be infrequently performed, usually one-off acts characterized by high levels of sensory pageantry that invoke elevated emotional responses. Such rites often involve what he has termed "rites of terror," rites well documented from among the Hellenistic mystery religions contemporaneous with the early Christianities (Martin 2005a; 2005b). Under such heightened emotional conditions, the circumstances of the initiatory actions and episodes will encode into the autobiographical memory of participants. Such memories—which include details about the precipitating event, including fellow participants—tend to be recalled with some accuracy and, consequently, to bind those who shared them into solidarity with one another and with the group sponsoring the initiation.

Whitehouse terms the kind of knowledge evoked by emotionally salient initiatory rites "spontaneous exegetical reflections" or personal "revelations" in the lives of individual initiates. In the absence of any centralized institution to regulate "orthodoxy," there are no conceptual controls upon such individual representations and, consequently, widespread systems of coherent beliefs are unable to develop. The proliferation of the early Christianities as small, face-to-face associations in which converts shared rites of baptism but little else beyond their remarkably plastic claims to various representations of Jesus—whether as teacher, as wonderworker, as martyr, or as deity—seem to conform to the predictions of Whitehouse's theory.

Although it may seem somewhat venturesome to characterize initiatory rites of immersion as "rites of terror," the same sources that document their widespread practice among the early Christianities (*supra*) also document them as modeled on the dramatically ascetic practices of John the Baptist (see also Jos. *Ant*. 18, 116 – 119). Although such dramatic practices of somatic and cognitive stimulation became replaced with prolonged periods of *catecheses* in the developing trajectories of some of the early Christianities (*Didache* 7.1, 11.1), Tertullian, at the end of the second century, could still compare Christian baptism with the traumatic rites of initiation into the Roman cult of Mithras (Tert., *De Bapt*. 5; *De praescr. haeret*. 40). Preparations for these non-catechetical Christian rites included nocturnal fasts and vigils. In addition, they included specifically Christian practices of recognizing and confessing their sins (Tert. *De Bapt*. 20; Just. *Ap*. 1.61), renunciations of the devil and daily exorcisms (Tert. *De Cor*. 3; Hipp. *Ap. Trad*. 20.3). Finally, Christian converts were baptized naked (*Ap. Trad*.) even as new members were initiated in the Hellenistic mystery rites. Surely such rites would have evoked the kinds of spontaneous exegetical reflections predicted by Whitehouse, especially in the context of early Christian social for-

mation. Even the catechetical traditions retained some of these preparatory practices (*Did.* 7.4).

In addition to the initiatory rites of Christian baptism modeled upon John's still undomesticated practices, Douglas Gragg, following the works of earlier biblical scholars, has argued that the parables of Jesus also seem designed similarly to deliver an "imaginative shock" to their hearers (Gragg 2011, Dodd 1936, 5; Jeremias 1955; Funk 1966, 138–139). And, the sayings of Jesus, collected in *Q* and *The Gospel of Thomas*, like the parables, have been described as enigmatic (Mack 1993, 105). Reminiscent of the proposal by the nineteenth-century classical philologist Richard Reitzenstein for the existence in late antiquity of *Lese-Mysterien*—"reading mysteries" or meditative techniques structured and transmitted textually—(Reitzenstein 1978 [1927], 52, 64), these enigmatic stories and aphorisms may well have induced among "catechumens" the "spontaneous exegetical reflections" that are characteristic of personal "revelations" in initiatory contexts (see e. g., GTh. 1).

ii. Baptism as "special agent ritual"

Based upon a tacit feature of human cognition by which ordinary actions and agents are represented but which are "violated" in religious rituals to include counterintuitive representations of superhuman agents in the actions performed, Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley have further characterized initiation rites as "special agent rituals," a class of ritual action in which the deity—or an authorized surrogate of the deity—is represented as the actor. They have differentiated these "special agent rituals" from "special patient rituals" in which the deities are represented as the recipient of the action, as, for example, in rites of sacrifice (Lawson and McCauley 1990, ii, 9). Since special patient rituals carry less authority and finality than those represented as being performed by the deities themselves, they require the kind of repetition that was characteristic of the Roman ritual system. And although such repetitive ritual systems may enjoy long periods of stability, disinterest and decline born of tedium are inevitable if not somehow relieved (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 193). In fact, the repetitive and routinized rituals that characterized the official system of Roman religion, despite escalating displays of public pomp and pageantry, had fallen into neglect by the end of the Republican period (Ferguson 1970, 74). This neglect was exacerbated, according to Livy, by the political and moral crises surrounding the Punic wars and by a perception that the traditional gods were no longer responding to Roman sacrificial entreaty (Livy 25.1; see Martin 2003–2004, 90–93).

Douglas Gragg has argued—rightly, in my judgment—that the popular attraction of the Hellenistic mystery religions to Romans was that their dramatic rites of initiation provided relief from, and a complementary supplement to, the ritual tedium of official Roman religion (Gragg 2004). Following Gragg's lead, I suggest a similar basis for the appeal of the early Christianities. After all, apart from a few public recognitions, such as boys taking their *toga virilis* upon reaching the age of puberty (Ov. *Fast*. 3. 771–790), initiation rites were notably absent from the official Roman system.

iii. The emergence of eucharistic sacrifice as central to Christian practice

Not until the early fourth century did Roman Christians fully embrace sacrifice in their ritual practices and become, thereby, acceptable to and officially accepted by Rome. They did this by interpreting the Eucharist as sacrificial. But how did the Eucharist come to be understood as sacrificial? And how did this practice come to replace baptism as the more central rite for Christians?

In their theory of ritual competence, Lawson and McCauley predict that "[t]hose rituals where superhuman agents function as the agent in the ritual (for example, when Jesus institutes the church) will always prove more central to a religious system than those where the superhuman agents serve some other role (as, for example, when they serve as the passive recipient of a sacrifice)" (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 125). This "Principle of Superhuman Agency" confirms the place of baptism as the founding and central initiatory ritual for the first Christians (e. g., Matt. 28: 9, Jn. 3.5). However, this principle is constrained, they argue, by a "Principle of Superhuman Immediacy." According to this second principle, "rituals in which superhuman agents are immediately involved (regardless of their roles) will always enjoy a more prominent place in the religious system than will those in which those agents only appear within an embedded, enabling action (again, regardless of their roles in that action)" (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 126). This constraining principle predicts the emergence of the Eucharist over baptism as the more central ritual for developing Christianity.

The principle of superhuman immediacy was formulated in Christianity as the doctrine of the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. This doctrine of the "real presence" depended, in turn, upon an interpretation of the Christian meal as a sacrifice in which the crucified Christ becomes represented *as* the sacrifice (as in the *Epistle to the Hebrews,* for example) rather than as the *recipient* of the sacrifice. When, according to this doctrine, the body and blood of Jesus are consumed, these surrogate elements for Christ serve, in the view of McCauley and Lawson, as the initial appearance of the superhuman agent (Christ) in its

structural description of the rite (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 118). Because of this postulated immediacy of the superhuman agent, the Eucharist, initially a repeated, special patient ritual, came to be considered more important than baptism in the Catholic ritual system and central to it (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 34). Although anticipated in the second century by Justin (*Ap*. 1. 66) and Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer*. 4.18.4), and in the third by Hippolytus (*Ap. Trad*. 32. 2), this doctrine of the "real presence" was given explicit theological formulation only in the fourth century by Cyril of Jerusalem (*Cat*. 19.7; 22.1–-3, 6, 9) (Dix 1945, 198 – 199).

The selective advantage of the Eucharist over baptism corresponded, further, to a distancing of initiates from the superhuman agent as represented in the Christian "special agent ritual" of baptism. This distancing began to occur already among the second generation of Christians with the development of religious specialists or surrogates who might act on behalf of the superhuman agent. This development required, in turn, the establishment of an "apostolic tradition," an ever-lengthening chain of enabling rituals by which surrogate agents, from the apostles through the bishops, might be ordained and who might act on behalf of Jesus.[183] This deflation in the ritual centrality of baptism was further ensured by the escalating numbers of children born to Christian families and baptized as infants, which increasingly replaced the dramatic initiatory significance it previously had for adult converts.

The initial appeal of Christianity to Romans seems to have been associated with its un-Roman but complementary emphasis on attractive rites of initiation. By the fourth century, a doctrinal view of the immediate presence of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist replaced the founding and initiatory act of Jesus in baptism, ever distanced by a successive line of enabling rituals. The subsequent emergence, by the fourth century, of sacrificial views of the Eucharist, corresponded with official Rome's acceptance, too, of Christianity.

Conclusions

In his most recent novel, *La Misteriosa Fiamma della Regina Loana*, Umberto Eco has his main character, Yambo, repeat an observation familiar from nineteenth-century researches into the origins of Christianity: "I'm not even sure that Jesus really existed," he muses. "Maybe we invented him ourselves, and that in itself

183 The sociopolitical interdependence of sacrificial practice with the development of hierarchical (and patriarchal) organizations of religions—including that of Christianity—has been well described by Nancy Jay (Jay 1992, 115 – 117).

would be a miracle." The miracle, Yambo continues in a more twenty-first century mode, is "*that our minds could come up with such a*[*n*]...*idea*" (Eco 2005, 351, emphasis added). The question implied in Yambo's musings (and in Eco's observation) is "what kind of mind would it take to come up with the idea of Jesus?" Or, if you would, "what kind of mind would it take seriously to entertain one of the alternative representations of Jesus?" This is the problem faced by historians who would explain the initial appeal of those early Christians who first ventured into the Roman world. Whereas Stark has addressed this question from his sociological perspective, his theory also explicitly introduces, he avers, aspects of "human cognition" (Stark 1997, 7)—although this aspect of his theory remains unelaborated, as does that of Lévi-Strauss. But it is such aspects, based upon the capacities of and the constraints upon human cognition and upon the application of these explanations to historiography, that most directly address the question posed by Eco.

In conclusion, therefore, I might suggest some implications of cognitive science for the historical study of early Christianity—or for the historical study of any religion.

1. Like any science, a science of religion, whether it is concerned with ethnographic or with historical data, must operate with some kind of valid organizing theory, a premise that has been neglected in the history of the field. Cognitive science can supply one such theory.

2. Because cognitive functions are finally based upon and explainable by tractable biochemical and neurophysiological processes, they belong to the material causes of sociohistorical formations and should be considered alongside geophysical influences, economic forces, the effects of political power, etc.

3. The neurological and cognitive processes that are currently being mapped by cognitive scientists are establishing the evolved, universal architecture of human mental functions from which human ethnographic and historical data have arisen. This mental architecture provides an explanatory basis for the comparative and historical work of religious scholars.

4. Recognizing that all historical remains are mental representations that have been externally inscribed and transmitted, historians can better interpret and organize their data according to human cognitive capacities and constraints. Historical texts, for example, can (and should) be evaluated in light of contemporary research on the relationship between cognitive patterning, constructive memory, and composition (Small 1997, 177–201).

5. Explanations for the cognitive construction of religious representations raise the question of what is to be considered, in academic study, "religious," and how and why some human occurrences and doings have been explained as "religious" in the first place, rather than as the ordinary consequences of

historical and social effects. As such, identification of data as "religious" (as acts of gods or saviors, as miracles, etc.) explains nothing but rather they become the objects of study to be explained.

6. As products of the mind, all historical data must be evaluated equally. No historical remains, textual or material, represent privileged data, whether those data are interpreted from social, political, economic or religious orientations—past or present. The material culture of the early Christianities must, for example, be included and integrated into the same explanatory and interpretative paradigm as that constructed for the textual traditions. Despite a comprehensive survey of the material remains from early Christianity, published a quarter of a century ago by Graydon Snyder (1985), neither biblical scholars nor historians of early Christianity have yet even attempted such a paradigm.

7. Historians deal with questions of change and transmission, and such issues involve processes of memory. How have historical data been encoded into memory and into which system of memory? Beyond the individual dynamics of memory, what is the transgenerational means for the transmission of those data? Why did Christianity prove more memorable than non-Christian alternatives? And why did some forms of the early Christianities prove more memorable than others? That is, what was the selective advantage that some forms of Christianities had over religio-philosophical alternatives in their transmission?

8. Natural and historicized or fixed cognition often conflict. Rome had criticized the emergent Christians for being un-Roman, that is, for not conforming to its traditional religious practices of sacrifice which, over time, had normalized values of Romanness at all levels of society. This ritual expression and transmission of Romanness was under the supervision of a centralized priesthood, which was, in turn, regulated by the Senate itself. Like the popular Hellenistic mystery religions, the earliest Christians, on the other hand, with their concerns to recruit and initiate, represented and transmitted their religiosity in terms of cognitively more immediate practices. These non-institutionalized Christians initially criticized Rome's officially sanctioned religious practices as being, well, un-Christian. The basis for both of these critiques was, however, ideological, born of ritually transmitted self-interests that sometimes resulted in violent and bloody encounters the equal of any in human history, no matter how romanticized in martyrologies and hagiographies. Underlying such ideological articulated critiques and conflicts were, however, common templates of human cognition—a theory of mind shared by all humans, common constraints upon the representation of human actions, including religious rituals, and the employment of differential memory systems in predictable ways. Such an understanding of these shared cognitive capacities and of their constraints might in-

form our understanding of the dynamics of *Religionskritik* and can contribute to our historical work generally.

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22. Aspects of Religious Experience among the Hellenistic Mystery Religions

> [If] you put [human beings] in emotionally charged situations—like physical trauma, extreme joy or fear, deep meditation—all of a sudden their neurons start firing like crazy, resulting in massively enhanced mental clarity.
> It's what gurus call higher consciousness. Biologists call it altered states, Psychologists call it super sentience…And Christians call it answered prayer.
>
> —Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons*

In an insightful passage from *Angels and Demons*, an otherwise improbable and often silly tale of Vatican intrigue, Dan Brown, author also of the wildly popular *Da Vinci Code*, has his characters suggest that what has been termed altered states of consciousness by some and religious experience by others, may actually represent an ordinary function of human neurocognitive processes–however elaborated or accentuated that activity is by inordinate contingencies (Brown 2000, 484). Whatever the neurobiological or cognitive validity of Brown's assertion,[184] his suggestion that what is termed "religious experience" is a mediated interpretation of ordinary and predictable biocognitive processes is sound (e. g., Pyysiäinen 2001, 114 – 130). The question then is not whether such biocognitive processes may be *identified* as *religious* or not, an idiosyncratic, i. e., contingent, nominalism, but of *explaining* the historically exploited *functions* of such processes. Religious experiences, in other words, are not some unmediated, *sui generis* ends in themselves or the basis upon which religious institutions have been constructed (James 1961 [1902], 42). An exception, some might note, are the claims of a few religious (confessional) strategies as, for example, that of the Protestant (largely Calvinistic) insistence that unmediated experiences (of the transcendent) provides the basis for religion[185] —but the theological pressures

184 Whereas "emotionally charged situations" (fear, stress, trauma, etc.) trigger the release of such neurotransmitters as epinephrine (adrenalin) and norepinephrine and steroids such as glucocorticoid which, among other things, accelerate baseline nervous system activity, it would seem that "what gurus call high-consciousness" might, as a consequence of their recommended techniques of meditation, better be modeled as a *retardation* in baseline nervous system activity, as might some if not most experiences of answered prayer (Pyysiäinen 2001, 114 – 115).

185 In Jonathan Edwards' "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, for example, Edwards avers that "true Religions consists so much in the Affections, that there can be no true Religion without them…" (Edwards 1746, I, 24 – 26). This emphasis on the experiential nature of religion arises from the Protestant Reformation emphasis on salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*) as confirmed in an experience of grace in contrast to the Roman Catholic view of salvation as mediated through the Church (*extra ecclesia nulla salus;* e. g., Origen, *In Jesu Nave hom.* 3,5;

of peers and context negate even that claim. (For a definitive discussion of constructed claims to the authority of *sui generis* religious experience, see Scharf 1998). Apart from claims based upon such confessional biases, religious experience must rather be considered an ordinary biocognitive state—however non-ordinary it may be considered—that is *created* and then *interpreted* as "religious" by the cultivating tradition for its own ends. The techniques for cultivating "religious" experience range from sensory deprivations in a ritual context, to the rhythms, chanting, and dancing associated with the rituals themselves, to the ingestion of drugs such as hallucinogens or alcohol. The question of religious experience is, in other words, not one concerning the *uniqueness* of that experience but is one concerning the cultivated *function* of ordinary experience that is religiously interpreted.

Ordinary "experience" may be defined historically as *pathos*, 'that which happens to a person or thing,' existentially as the *Erfahrung* of *Dasein* in its everydayness (Heidegger 1962, 72), and neurobiologically as the continual registration by the brain of sensory input. Cognitively, we can speak of *an* "experience" as a mental representation of some segment of that uninterrupted mental registration as a discrete and "lived through" event (*empeiria*, *Erlebnis*) that becomes encoded as a noteworthy event in memory, for without recall, there is no experience further to note. Further, experiences that are interpreted as especially noteworthy are often "emotionally-laden"—a characteristic associated with mnemonic encoding (Pyysiäinen, Chap. 5). One of the most celebrated insights of the past twenty years of neuroscience is the discovery—largely associated with the work of Antonio Damasio—that the brain's emotional systems are critical to cognition (Damasio 1994). We may stipulate *religious* experience, therefore, to be an *interpretation* of an ordinary if noteworthy biocognitive state as being non-ordinary in some physiological or psychological, and, consequently, emotionally-laden, sense and a further *interpretation* of that non-ordinary, emotionally laden state in terms of a *primed* religiosity.

"Priming" is a term employed by cognitive scientists to refer to "the [mnemonic] ability to identify or produce an item…as a result of a specific prior encounter with the item" (Buckner 2000, 822; Schacter and Curran 2000, 830). Religious primings are roughly of two kinds: those in which participants are primed by the tradition into which they have been born and those in which participants are primed by a tradition into which they have been converted. Unlike the former, converts require some specific sort of ritual recognition or initiation into

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Cyprian *Ep.* 73; Council of Florence (1441), Pope Eugenius, *Decree for the Jacobites*, in the Bull *Cantata Domino, Denzinger* 1957, 714).

in that tradition.[186] Whereas participants in many religious traditions include both those who are born into that tradition as well as new converts, participation in some religious traditions is exclusively made up of converts. The Graeco-Roman mystery religions exemplify a type of religion to which participants are converted and into which they must, therefore, be initiated. The religious knowledge associated with that tradition is a consequence of the experiences cultivated by these initiatory rites and that offers a clear historical example of the functions of religious experience. I should like, therefore, to examine this question of the functions of experiences induced or cultivated within religious traditions by the example of the Graeco-Roman (Hellenistic) mysteries.

Initiation and experience among the Graeco-Roman mystery cults

Although "initiation" has proved to be a problematic category in the study of religions (Graff 2003; Lincoln 2003), there is agreement that the central feature of the Graeco-Roman mystery cults is their rites of initiation. In fact, the Greek *mysteria*, *myein*, *mysesis* are translated into Latin as *initia*, *initiare*, *initiatio* (Burkert 1987, 7). Following, perhaps, the oft-cited but non-historical exhortation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (*Hymn Hom. Ceres* 476), or that by Apuleius (*Met*. 11.23), to maintain the secret of the mysteries, study of these rites has largely been characterized by abortive attempts to decode their *contents*, purportedly a secret corpus of occult knowledge transmitted to new initiates. The experiential *function* of these rites has, thereby, been largely neglected.

The experience induced by the initiatory rites of the Graeco-Roman mysteries can generally be characterized as an emotionally charged sense of cognitive disorientation and vulnerability. The fourth-century philosopher Themistius describes the initiatory rites at Eleusis, for example, as a wandering "through the dark…: then," he continues, "come all the terrors before the final initiation, shuddering, trembling, sweating, amazement" (Them. in Stobaeus 4; cited by Mylonas 1961, 264 – 265).

Initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries was preceded by a preparatory period of fasting (Mylonas 1961, 258 – 259), a somatic deprivation that would have

186 The sociologist of religion, Rodney Stark has argued that converts are first attracted to a new religion on the basis of prior social relations. It is only after joining the new religion that such converts actually learn the beliefs of that religion. While this argument is based on new religious movements in contemporary North American, Stark has argued the general historical validity of his thesis (e. g., Stark 1996).

heightened all of the sensory effects of the rites and contributed to its salient character. This fast was broken with a ritual drinking of the *kykeon*, possibly a fermented or even a hallucinogenic beverage (Wasson *et al*. 1978; Scarborough 1991, 140, 166n. 37). At dusk, initiates were led by torchlight past a cave that was presented to them as the entrance to the terrible underworld itself (Clinton 1992, 84–86). In the Telesterion, the chamber of initiation, they were blindfolded (Bianchi 1976, nos. 47, 49–50; Martin 2005 n. 21), a further sensory deprivation that would have further contributed to their nocturnal disorientation and psychological disorganization (e.g., the classic article by Heron 1957). This disorienting effect was heightened by the acoustic anomaly of a gong sounded unexpectedly from the midst of the darkness as the Eleusinian hierophant summoned Kore from the underworld (Clinton 1992, 86 and n. 128). The Eleusinian initiatory "night of the mysteries" culminated, according to Plutarch, with an abrupt burst of brilliant light that accompanied the sudden emergence of the hierophant from the darkness and that further astonished the disoriented initiates (Plu. *Mor*. 81E; also Hipp. *Haer*. 5.8.40 = *ANF* 5.3). This ritualized emergence into light out of the ordeals of initiatory darkness recalls the culminating effects of Eleusinian initiation as described by Themestius. When the initiates emerged from their initiatory ordeals of darkness into revelatory light, they were, he wrote, "received into pure regions and meadows, with voices and dances and the majesty of holy sounds and shapes" (Stobaeus 4; cited by Mylonas 1961, 264–265).

Many of these elements of initiatory ritual are also characteristic of the Isiac mysteries, which seem, in fact, to have been modeled upon the earlier Eleusinian rites (Burkert 1987, 9). According to Apuleius, Isiac initiation, like that at Eleusis, was held after a preparatory period of purification and fasting. Although Isiac initiations were not usually held in darkened chambers (Wild 1981, 206), they were performed at night and were accompanied by exotic sounds, in this case, those of the Egyptian *sistrum*, a kind of rattle or noisemaker (Apuleius, *Met*. 11. 4). After initiates trod the fearsome "threshold of Proserpina" and returned from this "boundary of death," they witnessed, "in the middle of the night…the sun flashing with bright light" as they "came face to face with the gods below and the gods above" (Apuleius, *Met*. 11. 23).

Similarly, the painted scenes of initiation on the walls of the Mithraeum of Capua Vetere in southern Italy give some idea of the dramatic ordeals with which Mithraic initiates were threatened (Vermaseren 1971, 24–42). In the first of these scenes, an initiate is depicted as bound and naked, as menaced by sword and by fire, and as undergoing a symbolic death (Vermaseren 1963, 132; Clauss 2001, 103). Similarly, in an initiatory scene on a cup discovered in a mithraeum in Mainz (Horn 1994), the initiating Father aims an arrow from his drawn bow directly at the head of the initiate who is portrayed as smaller,

naked and vulnerable (Beck 2000, Pl. XIII). Such scenes recall Tertullian's description of Mithraic initiation as a "mimicry of martyrdom" (*De Cor.* 15.4). The third and fourth panels of the Capua Vetere scenes of initiation are damaged and the scenes portrayed there obliterated (Vermaseren 1971, 34, plate XXIII), but the final panel of these scenes shows the initiate with his blindfold removed (Vermaseren 1971, plate XXV).

Hints of similar features also survive from the Dionysian mysteries, though the data is less clear and the interpretations contested. As in the other mysteries, Dionysian initiations occurred at night following a period of fasting (Livy 39.9.4; Turcan 1996, 308). And certainly the drinking of wine was a persistent feature of the Dionysian cult, including his mysteries. Similarly, Dionysians initiates are represented as blindfolded (as in the stucco relief from the Roman Villa Farnesina, Nilsson 1975, 79, Fig. 11; Bianchi 1976, plate 86) and nude (stucco relief from the Roman Villa Farnesina (Nilsson 1975, 80 – 81, Figs. 12 and 13). And whatever one makes of the representation of a terrified woman portrayed at the end of the left wall of the Dionysian frescoes in the Villa dei Misteri at Pompeii—terrified, perhaps, by a scene on the opposite corner of a winged woman about to flog—or threatening to flog—a young woman, the Dionysian mysteries also included, in the words of Celsus, an inducement of "phantoms and terrors" (Origen, *c. Cel.* 4.10), i.e., "psychological ordeals, as in the mysteries of Mithras" (Turcan 1996, 309). The Dionysian initiation concluded with liberating ecstasies of inebriation and frenzied dance to the accompaniment of flutes, pan-pipes, cymbals, castanets and timbrels (Turcan 1996, 311).

Whether or not initiation into the Graeco-Roman mysteries actually involved the infliction of any physical violence upon initiates (Beskow 1979), the available evidence collectively associates these rites with cognitively disorienting experiences that would have rendered the initiates psychologically susceptible to their initiatory goals (Turcan 1996, 112, 108). The dramatic, even traumatic, effects employed in the production of such experiential affects (or *pathê*) by the Graeco-Roman mysteries (Arist. frag. 15, and Synesius, *Dion* 10; see Burkert 1987, 69 n. 13; Turcan 1996, 236, 239) can only be termed "rites of terror" (Whitehouse 2000, 21 – 33).

Initiatory rites of terror and the transmission of cult knowledge

The British anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse has now advanced a theory of divergent modes of religious transmission which distinguishes precisely between those religious traditions that "involve instruction of a dogmatic nature" and those "founded upon...emotional experiences." Further, he offers a cognitive

based *explanation* for that differentiation. Whitehouse terms these divergent modes of religiosity "doctrinal" and "imagistic" (Whitehouse 1995, 2000, 2004).[187]

Religious knowledge in the doctrinal mode of religiosity, according to Whitehouse, is formulated as a coherent set of "orthodox" beliefs or doctrines that are organized and maintained by a dynamic and hierarchically organized leadership. This coherent corpus of teachings is transmitted by repetitive and routinized instruction that supports the retention of these teachings and allows for their wide dissemination by authorized teachers and missionaries. The widespread distribution of religious knowledge that is characteristic of this mode of religiosity is constitutive of large, imagined communities in which group affinities are largely anonymous, in our context, for example, second-temple Judaism, Roman official religion or, increasingly, post-Constantinian Christianity.[188] While this doctrinal modality may be found in non-literate contexts, it is more often characteristic of literate societies or of those influenced by them. By contrast, "imagistic" is Whitehouse's designation for a convergence of practices by which religious knowledge is transmitted through infrequently performed rituals that are rendered especially memorable through intense sensory pageantry and heightened emotionality.[189]

The two modes of religious transmission proposed by Whitehouse rely on and are constrained by different systems of memory that are selected for by

187 Although Whitehouse developed his theory to explain ethnographic data that he had collected during his fieldwork among the Baining of Papua New Guinea concerning a millenarian cult and the groups that periodically splinter from this cult, he concluded his study with the suggestion, based in the universal foundations and dynamics of human cognition, that his explanation might be generalizable. Some seventy-five years ago, the historian of religion, Raffaele Pettazzoni, had also noted morphological parallels between the initiation rites of the Greek mystery cults and those of some Australian tribes (Pettazzoni 1924, 21–44), and forty years ago, Maarten Vermaseren, one of the great scholars of Mithraism, suggested that certain features of this Roman cult might be found among what he then termed "the primitive peoples of contemporary] Australia, Africa and America" (Vermaseren 1963, 129). Neither, however, offered any theoretical basis for making for these ethnographic analogies.

188 Douglas Gragg has argued that Roman official religion is best characterized as "cognitively optimal" rather than as "doctrinal" (Gragg 2004; but see Martin 2005)

189 It is important to note that "imagistic" does not refer, in Whitehouse's description, to religious traditions that trade in images—a trait of virtually all religions. Whitehouse's characterization of initiation rituals in imagistic traditions conforms to the predictions of McCauley's and Lawson's "ritual form hypothesis" concerning "special agent rituals" or rituals performed by the gods themselves (or by their ordained surrogates); these predictions are based upon the cognitive representational possibilities for any human actions (Lawson and McCauley 2002, 26–33).

the alternative ways by which different forms of religious knowledge are encoded. The catechetical instruction in and repetitive reinforcement of the coherent systems of beliefs that are characteristic of the doctrinal mode of religiosity are encoded in the explicit memory system as generalized scripts or schemas of knowledge. The experiences evoked by the initiatory rites of terror characteristic of the imagistic mode are, on the other hand, encoded in the episodic or autobiographical memory of the participants.

A particularly salient type of episodic memory, sometimes referred to as "flashbulb" memory, often results from participation in some particularly traumatic or consequential event. This effect is especially characteristic of the abrupt and overwhelming emotional experiences that are associated with Hellenistic mystery initiations. Such events tend to create strong memories, the particularities of which are only recalled by initiates when they are presented with stimuli associated with their participation in that rite. These "primed" memories typically support, thereby, small-scale, face-to-face communities characterized by an enduring social cohesion among participants in their initiatory rituals.

In addition to social solidarity, the cognitive shocks produced by initiatory rites of terror occasion, in the absence of any suitable scripts or schemas for interpreting the disorienting and anomalous events to which initiates are subjected during these rituals, especially intense processes of what Whitehouse terms "spontaneous exegetical reflection (SER)" (Whitehouse 2004, 113). This absence of any coherent corpus of beliefs or bodies of doctrine raises the possibility for many layers of relevant interpretations. The analogical reflections inherent in such non-scripted knowledge—including knowledge of the ritual procedures themselves—may be shaped into a local knowledge since the initiates into a particular association repeatedly witness, and even participate in, subsequent initiatory rites as organizers, helpers, or observers. This repetitive participation in initiatory rites seems especially to be the case for mysteries like those of Mithras that have a structured regimen of multiple initiations.

The primary mission of any group is to maintain the continuity of that group. For religious associations like the Hellenistic mysteries, experiences are not the basis for their religiosity. Rather, emotionally salient experiences are carefully crafted and orchestrated by these religions to exploit human cognitive processes in ways that promote, first of all, the intersubjective solidarity of the group and, second, that insure the transgenerational continuity of that group. Claims to the initiatory authority of their patron deities legitimate group solidarity and transmission for religious associations but similar initiatory dynamics are characteristic of non-religious "secret societies," fraternal orders and military corps the world over.

Initiatory rites of terror and the development of cognitive maturity

If initiatory experiences of terror represent an exploitation of cognitive [mnemonic] dynamics in service of group maintenance by the transmission of religious knowledge by the Hellenistic mysteries, what was their appeal to potential members? The apparent attraction of the various mysteries will of course vary with the public face presented by each. A growing panhellenisim contributed to the initial appeal of the Mysteries of Demeter to Greek speakers beyond Eleusis (Mylonas 1961, 7), for example, as did a subsequent philhellenism among Romans (Beard-North-Price 1998, 223), whatever their ambiguous views about "non-Roman" influences. The mysteries of Isis initially appealed, of course, to Egyptians or to those of Egyptian descent and, later, to those who subscribed to a popular Roman fascination with "wisdom from the East" and became, consequently, "adopted" (i.e., initiated) "Egyptians" (Martin 1997). This latter fascination with an initiatory wisdom contributed also to the appeal of the mysteries of the "Thracian" Dionysus and "Persian" Mithras. Underlying the varied public or surface attractions of the mysteries, however, there seems also to have been a common appeal of cognitive benefit to initiates that outweighed the costs of the publicly acknowledged and even popularly exaggerated (e.g., by the Christian apologists) initiatory ordeals. This benefit represented a potential for the cultivation and development of tacit cognitive capacities, such as that described by the developmental cognitivist Annette Karmiloff-Smith, as the process of representational redescription (Karmiloff-Smith 1992; for a more detailed development of this argument, see Martin 2009).[190]

At the initial stage of cognitive maturation, only the anomalous and incomprehensible experiences orchestrated by the Graeco-Roman initiatory rites of terror would be subject to conscious recall and verbal report. The spontaneous exegetical reflections (SERs) occasioned by these rites would not, according to Karmiloff-Smith's developmental model, be available to conscious access (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 22). According to Karmiloff-Smith, any representations of knowledge in this initial phase are "simply added, domain specifically, to the existing stock" of stored knowledge and will have minimal effect, if any, on knowledge previously encoded in working memory (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 18–19). Po-

190 I do not argue that initiation into the mysteries occasions in any precise way the specific developmental formats of representational redescription modeled by Karmiloff-Smith nor am I qualified to argue the validity for her specific model. My suggestion is simply that the cognitive processes initiated by mystery initiation occasions the possibility of initiating a developmental process of cognitive maturation like that described by Karmiloff-Smith.

tential representational links between this knowledge—between ordinary and initiatory knowledge about the world—though potentially significant, remain implicit (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 20).

On the other hand, the ritual production of internal representations might be described as an exploitation of innate cognitive potentials by the introduction of selected stimuli. As a consequence of our evolutionary history, the mental capacities of human beings—like that of all species—are exquisitely attuned to processing just those environmental stimuli that are required to establish the parameters of actions necessary for their survival (Boyer 2001, 120 – 121). And, like all species, human beings require, in order to survive, rather detailed information about their complex, natural surroundings. The intelligence of *Homo sapiens*, consequently, gravitates naturally to spatial organization—a cognitive proclivity especially characteristic of males (Sherry 2000). One of the dominant sets of stimuli introduced to the male initiates of Mithraism was, of course, precisely that relating to place and environment.

The Mithraic temples themselves, designed according to Porphyry as a "likeness of the cosmos" (Porph. *Antr. 6)*, exploited a syntax of place and environment (as described by Richard Gordon 1996), as did the Mithraic tauroctony, a collage of artistic clichés organized as a "celestial template" (Beck 1998, 125). This architectural and iconography representation of cosmic space effectively exploited the innate cognitive capacity for spatial location among Mithraism's male initiates by effectively locating and situating them in a specific astrological/astronomical organization of the cosmos (Martin 1987). In this first representational format, however, such intuitive experiences of location would not, according to Karmiloff-Smith's model, be either generalizable or articulable.

In a second format of re-representation, initial representations, according to Karmiloff-Smith, become "reduced" in a way that they lose many of their details; they become simpler and less specialized but more cognitively flexible. The rich, evocative complexity of the Mithraic architecture and iconography might, for example, become conceivable as a safe and controlled space that is recognizable and realizable in the cosmomorphic mithraeum and its communal brotherhood. The cognitive flexibility that is characteristic of conceptual representations at this stage can, according to Karmiloff-Smith, now be employed for other goals where explicit knowledge is required (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 21.) Thus, generalizable representations of Mithraic spatial organization and order could be transferred, for example, to an affirmation of loyalty to the wider realm of a *pax Romana* (Merkelbach 1984, 153 – 188), though yet without any reflective intention to do so.

In a final stage of redescription, "knowledge is recoded," according to Karmiloff-Smith, "into a cross-system code...[that is] close enough to natural language for easy translation into stable, communicable form" (Karmiloff-Smith

1992, 23). Once this ordinary cognitive process of redescription had taken place and explicit representations become manipulable," Karmiloff-Smith concludes, violations could be introduced into data-driven, veridical descriptions of the world (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 22). Such violations would include those counterfactual and counterintuitive representations that are characteristic of every religious claim (Boyer 2001) and of their innovative and unique representations and formulations.

By this cognitive developmental interpretation, initiation in the mysteries, whatever their local variants, potentially accomplished an increase in and perfection of a particular cognitive skill—the innate capacity of human cognition to achieve "representational flexibility and control" (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, 16). It initiated, in other words, a process of cognitive maturity, of doing things creatively and with greater self-reliance in contrast to acting in merely conventional and expected ways (Tomasello 1999, 53)—what today we might refer to as "street smarts."

Mithraism, a new Roman religion in an expanding world of Roman cultural influence well illustrates the cognitive benefits of mystery initiation. Its ritual regimen offered the generally uneducated lower ranks of the military and the petty civil servants who dominated its membership, its primary population of potential recruits, an incremental possibility for a cognitive maturity that was elsewhere available only through alternative, class-differentiated techniques such as formal education.[191] The competitive advantage of such a supple and innovative mind among the less privileged classes is clear. This (potential) advantage is instantiated by the membership of Mithraic communities whose military members must deal quickly and decisively with the rapidly changing exigencies of battlefield conditions and whose civil servants had to administer an often discontent population. It is perhaps this expanded—if non-schooled—cognitive flexibility, control, and creativity that has been dismissed by educated detractors of such associations as examples of occult or syncretistic nonsense but perceived by others as the "wisdom" of the mysteries.

191 Whereas such rites as the course of Mithraic initiation encouraged and supported the development and expansion of cognitive capacity, formal education included, in addition, an intellectual mastery of some prescribed content (Clark 1997, 205).

Conclusion

Contrary to those who might argue that ritual is derived from experience (Redfield 2003, 257), I have argued that experience is the calculated product of ritual. For those converted into a religious tradition, religious experiences are the construction of rites of initiation (or of instruction). For those converted into as for those born into a religious tradition, religious experiences represent interpretative confirmations of specific religious primings.

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23. The Uses (and Abuse) of the Cognitive Sciences for the Study of Religion

A scientific study of religion was first proposed by the comparative philologist Max Müller, widely considered to be one of the founders of the modern academic study of religion. The philosopher of religion Donald Wiebe has argued, correctly I think, that the "new spirit of inquiry," which Müller proposed for this study (Müller 1881 [1867], xii), was—despite his personal religious commitments—nevertheless fully engaged with the scientific impulse that swept Europe at the end of the nineteenth-century. Wiebe concludes that "the explicit agenda adopted by...[Müller—and by other] founders of Religious Studies as an academic (university) concern committed the enterprise to the detached, scientific understanding of religion wholly uninfected by any sentiment of religiosity" (Wiebe 1999, 155). As Müller had written in his 1870 *Introduction to the Science of Religion:*

> A comparison of all the religions of the world in which none can claim a privileged position will no doubt seem to many dangerous and reprehensible because ignoring that peculiar reverence which everybody, down to the mere fetish worshipper, feels for his *own* religion and for his *own* God.

"Let me say then at once," Müller concluded:

> I myself have shared these misgivings, but that I have tried to overcome them, because I would not and could not allow myself to surrender either what I hold to be the truth or what I hold still dearer than the truth, the right tests of truth (Müller 1893 [1870], 8).

Wiebe argues that this late nineteenth-century scientific impulse, out of which Müller, and others, were first motivated to propose a scientific study of religion, was subsequently subverted by an enduring, if covert, religio-theological pursuit within this new academic field of study. This "crypto-theological agenda informing the study of religion" is, Wiebe contends, "becoming more overt" and is "actually being touted as the only proper method for the study of religion" (Wiebe 1999, 155–156). Wiebe has characterized the continuing religious character of such study in modern research universities, as a "failure of nerve" (Wiebe 1999, 141–162). He borrowed this characterization from the classicist Gilbert Murray who had judged as a failure the shift from the classical Greek confidence in normal human effort and the enlightened mind to a "loss of self-confidence" and a subsequent intensification "of certain spiritual emotions" during the Hellenistic period (Murray 1955, 119).

The Cambridge classicist Jane Harrison was one of the last of the early scholars to propose a scientific study of religion and in many ways the most modern. Like Murray, Harrison was associated with the circle of Cambridge ritualists who had sought to apply scientific findings to the study of Greek religion. In her contribution to a volume commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, Harrison suggested that a view of religion that focused on the evolution of "each mental capacity" for "specific religious ideas and practices" might provide a scientific basis for the study of religion (Harrison 1909, 497). This prescient proposal precisely articulates the contemporary agenda for a cognitive science of religion.

The Uses of Cognitive Science in Research on Religion

Like any life form, *Homo sapiens* is an evolved species. This means that humans share certain behavioral and cognitive biases that have been selected for over evolutionary time. These evolved biases make up a system of adaptive "defaults" against which much subsequent human behavior and thought can be analyzed and understood. The explanations for these phenotypical biases are biological, that is, they are explainable in natural—and non-dualistic—terms of the neural, electrical and chemical activities of the brain. Such explanations are currently being explored by cognitive scientists, a broad, interdisciplinary group of scholars that includes biologists, neuroscientists, ethologists, evolutionary psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers, computer scientists, memory experts, historians, including historians of religion, etc. These cognitive scientists seek to explain not only the kinds of behaviors and mental representations allowed by the capacities of and constraints upon brain functions but the processes by which they are stored in memory and are recalled, the ways by which some but by no means all of these become transmitted and received, publicly shared and transformed, and the relationships among them—including those specific relationships among ordinary evolved behaviors and representations that are generally viewed as "religious." Because of this shared evolutionary history, the cognitive paradigm can offer a theoretical basis for explaining recurring patterns among the data of human (religious) expressions as well as an explanatory metric for more precisely identifying and understanding their historical and cultural differences.

Despite early attempts to establish theoretical grounds for its study, religious scholars have largely shunned any theoretical approach to their own work in which a research project is formulated in terms of clearly stated hypotheses that might be publically, empirically, and critically assessed. Simply to cite the conclu-

sions of theoretically oriented researchers from another field of study, from Durkheim, for example, or from Weber, does not itself constitute a theoretical stance. As the philosopher Daniel Dennett has argued, it seems as though religion is enchanted by some sort of spell protecting it from scientific inquiry—a situation that simply doesn't exist in any other academic field of study (Dennett 2006). Consequently, a field of religious studies has never developed in which scholars working in different historical or ethnographic specializations might share a common disciplinary discourse and make valid generalizations about a common theoretical object, "religion." In fact, after more than a century of a growing field of religious studies in modern research universities, it is difficult to find scholars in the field who are able to agree—beyond their historical or ethnographic specialization —exactly what their subject matter is.

Efforts by some scholars of religion to employ the cognitive sciences—and their theoretical frame of Darwinian evolution—towards establishing a shared research paradigm for the study of religion is not a unique endeavor. Such efforts are under way in virtually all areas of humanistic and social scientific study, e. g., art, classics, cultural studies, theatre, ethics, gender studies, law, music, political science, psychology, sociology. Perhaps of most interest for those religious scholars who focus on textual traditions or on the history of religions is the evolutionary/cognitive oriented theorizing by literary critics (e. g., Flesch) and by historians (e. g., Smail 2008), and for those who focus on non-literary traditions, that by anthropologists (e. g., Cohen 2007) and archaeologists (e. g., Mithen 1996). While a cognitive study of religion is not unique among the humanities and the social sciences, it does occupy a certain pride of place since a few scholars of religion have been actively involved in theorizing a cognitive science of religion since 1980 (e. g., Guthrie 1980; Lawson and McCauley 1990; Whitehouse 1995). More recently, a growing number of religious scholars have begun to employ evolutionary and cognitive theorizing in their own research and, in turn, draw upon work in their areas of specialization to assess these theories on the basis of the enormous wealth of historical and ethnographic data they control, as well as upon the results of experimental protocols they design—a real departure for humanists. The participation of religious scholars in the interdisciplinary theorizing and research projects of the cognitive sciences may be the first time in the history of the field when scholars of religion have actively contributed to shaping and developing a scientific research paradigm rather than being simply parasitic on those of others.

The Uses of Cognitive Science in Teaching about Religion

One of the tenets of the modern research university is that the most innovative and significant teaching grows out of the research of its faculty and, conversely, that much research is stimulated by issues raised from teaching—even from instruction in the ubiquitous undergraduate introductory course. What, then, is the place of research conclusions by cognitive scientists of religion in undergraduate instruction?

Most undergraduate students of religion are presented with an enormous amount of data—from world religions surveys, to broad overviews of particular religious traditions, to specialized treatments of specific topics or issues that reflect the instructor's own research interests. As fascinating as is all of this exotic material and as competently as it is usually presented, students are rarely offered any theoretical framework(s) whereby they might integrate this data, much less so as they go from one instructor's course to another. Rather than more data, and the idiosyncratic interpretations that generally accompany them, what seems requisite—especially in the undergraduate context of an education in the arts and sciences—are theories that might explain human actions and their representations across the artificial boundaries of disciplinary practices.

Apart from the insightful if now dated efforts of some nineteenth-century social scientists, few recent explanatory theories have been proposed for the study of religion. Two among these dominate the field—insofar as explanatory theorizing in the study of religion can be said to have any dominion. The first is an economic modeling of religion, most well-known to scholars of religion from proponents of rational choice theory. The second is the cognitive sciences—which have challenged rational choice theory by demonstrating that humans do not, in fact, generally act so rationally. (The incorporation of cognitive research into economics has resulted more recently in the field of behavioral economics, an interesting approach yet to be incorporated into the study of religion.)

In my own teaching at the undergraduate level, I have found students eager to explore explanatory theories of religion—they are, after all, being presented with explanatory theorizing in most of their other subjects. Such theorizing, many of them come to understand, forms a basis that will allow them to explore new areas and novel materials not covered in most (small) departments of religion—and even to make sense of the data presented in their other subjects. And I find that when theory is emphasized, even in the introductory courses when these explanatory possibilities must be presented in a rudimentary way, many students respond more favorably to that aspect of the course than to the data surveyed. Foremost among their responses is their interest in evolutionary and cognitive explanations. The nature of their response is not only a realization that it is possible systematically to make sense of the range of (often, to them, bizarre) data presented in

any religious studies course but even to see how materials from different times and places might be compared as they go from course to course and from subject to subject throughout the university.

The Abuses of Cognitive Science in the Study of Religion

The cognitive sciences of religion is—like any science—abused if it becomes employed for ideological/theological ends rather than for those of scientific knowledge. Theologians have always drawn upon what is considered to be authoritative knowledge to articulate—and to legitimate—their ideational religious practices. Until the nineteenth century, that knowledge was primarily philosophical. So, for example, we have theological articulations that employ Greek logos philosophy (e.g., John 1: 1), Plato (Augustine), Aristotle (Aquinas), Enlightenment thought (Deism), existential-phenomenology (Tillich), etc. With the Darwinian turn in the mid-nineteenth century, however, theologians increasingly began to use the burgeoning corpus of scientific knowledge to articulate their views—and ironically, in their attempts to defend their religious positions against that very same knowledge (e.g., arguments for Creation Science or for Intelligent Design). The problem with the derivative character of theological knowledge is that while it may be philosophical it has never produced innovative philosophy, and while scientistic, it most certainly isn't science. Nevertheless, there is today increasing interest in research and teaching in the area of "religion and science" that seeks to further a religious (or "spiritual") agenda. And a significant amount of funding is available today from agencies with religious agendas to support such accommodationist research and teaching. It would seem, in other words, that even as past attempts at establishing a scientific study of religion suffered "a failure of nerve" and reverted to religious agendas, the cognitive science of religion is in danger of falling prey to the same capture.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen if cognitive science will finally become established as a shared and productive paradigm for scientific research in the study of religion. This possibility is suggested, however, by the increase in the number of research and graduate degree programs in religion that incorporate the cognitive sciences, for example, at the universities of Aarhus, Helsinki, Oxford, Queen's University Belfast, University of British Columbia, University of California, Santa Barbara, and Emory University. Further, there has been a significant increase in

recent years in the number of panels devoted to discussions of this paradigm at meetings of various professional associations, for example, the North American Association for the Study of Religion, the American Academy of Religion, the Society for Biblical Literature, the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, the American Anthropological Association, and the International Association for the History of Religions. And the results of anthropological, historical, and experimental studies of religious behaviors, ideas, and even specific religious traditions and rites have begun to be widely published, discussed and assessed. Most recent, the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion was founded to coordinate these activities (see www.iacsr.com).

Whether or not one agrees with Wiebe's rather "harsh and judgmental" assessment of modern religious studies, I think few would disagree with Müller's own assessment that the "very title of the Science of Religion will jar...on the ears of many persons" (Müller 1893 [1870], 8)—and, I might add, continues to do so. As one colleague recently assessed the situation, she had hoped at first that this whole proposal for a cognitive science of religion might simply go away; when it didn't, she hoped that she might nevertheless be able to continue her traditional history of religions research without engaging it; finally, she had to concede that its potential significance and growing import were such that—for better or worse—it could no longer simply be ignored or discounted. This conclusion concerning the nascent cognitive science of religion seems fairly to reflect the current state of affairs in the study of religion generally. I invite you, therefore, to engage this scientific approach in your own work, to assess its utility, evaluate its validity, and then draw your own conclusions.

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24. The Future of the Past: The History of Religions and Cognitive Historiography

> Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; nor under circumstances they have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted.
>
> —Karl Marx (1852)

Introduction

The proposal for a scientific study of religions was born of the same scientific impulse that swept Europe from the mid-nineteenth century and that gave birth to the study of history itself as a scientific and autonomous discipline (Stern 1956, 16; Wiebe 1999, esp. 3–50). This new *Religionswissenschaft* was understood to be distinct from its previous philosophical and literary contexts, and, most significantly, from its previous theological commitments.

The scientific impulse in the study of history is perhaps best exemplified by the works of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). This German historian emphasized the importance of critically examining primary sources and of establishing historical facts empirically, in order to narrate, thereby, simple historical truth "*wie*," in his famous formulation, "*es eigentlich gewesen*," that is, only to relate what actually happened (Iggers 1968, 63–64). Although von Ranke has acquired a reputation as a "souless positivist" concerned only with facts (Iggers 1968, 65), the distinguished intellectual historian Georg Iggers has concluded that "no German historian of the nineteenth century (with the possible exception of [J. G.] Droysen) paid as much attention to the theoretical foundations for his historical practice as did Ranke" (Iggers 1968, 64–65). Nevertheless, a historical positivism promulgated in von Ranke's name, largely by his American followers, continued to be widely influential among subsequent historians, including historians of religion, if generally unacknowledged by them (Iggers 1968, 64–65). These historians essentially consider that once the historical evidence is all in, it will speak for itself.

The new scientific study of religion is often associated with, and certainly is exemplified by, the work of von Ranke's near contemporary, Max Müller (1823–1900). His edited translations of the *Sacred Books of the East*, continued after his death, made a large number of primary sources from Asian traditions available for the first time to Western scholars (Müller 1879–1910). His critical approach to these texts, and that of his contemporaries, was comparative and historical, modeled on the scientific philology of the time. However, the new *Religionswis-*

senschaft soon took a decidedly anti-empirical, even anti-scientific turn (Wiebe 1999, 141–162).

Increasingly, historians of religion rejected scientific studies of religion as positivistic and reductionist and turned rather, to various inflections of *Verstehen*, an approach to historiography associated with the work of Max Weber that seeks an empathetic understanding of historical subjects rather than treating them as empirical data (Oakes 1977). Influenced by German romanticism and ignoring Weber's own commitment and major contributions to historiography, historians such as J. G. Droysen, W. Dilthey, and R. G. Collingwood came to embrace *verständnisvoll* hermeneutical methods. Subsequently, historians of religion abandoned historical methods altogether and the study of religion became associated with an ahistorical approach in which "history of religions" became a synonym for assembling a phenomenological corpus of truncated and decontextualized cultural data, the temporality of which was disregarded in favor of claims to there being manifestations of a *sui generis* sacrality, e. g., by members of the "history of religions" school associated with the influential work of Mircea Eliade, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. This "humanistic" turn, then, allowed for a return of theological, or crypto-theological, agendas, however furtive, to the study of religion, a return, as it were, to its early nineteenth century pre-scientific predisposition.

A subsequent postmodernist vogue in religious studies revived a kind of pseudo-historicism that emphasized the socio-historical construction of cultural particulars. Despite its abstruse pseudo-philosophical façade, however, the postmodernist emphasis on cultural relativism is simply a naïve reminiscence of the constructionist views of nineteenth-century historicism.[192] However, their historicist views neglected the historicity of primary sources and were informed, rather, by an anti-theory, anti-science ideology that provided legitimation for many in the academy to pursue religious interests in the academic study of religion.

Given this somewhat desultory view of the history of religions, what might the future hold for such study? I maintain at the outset that the history of religions must regain its core defining characteristic as *history*.

192 As with Postmodernism, Georg Iggers notes that eighteenth-century German historicism was a reaction against Enlightenment thought, and like Postmodernism, it viewed, in Iggers' summary, "all social reality as a historical stream where no two instances are comparable and which assumes that the value standards and logical categories, too, are totally immersed in the stream of history" (Iggers 1968, 30).

Historiographical cognition

Historiographical thinking seems to be an aspiration of all human beings. In the concise formulation of the second-century Valentinian Theodotus (as reported by Clement of Alexandria), salvific knowledge consists of knowing "who we are, what we have become, where we have been, and where we are going" (Clem. Alex. *Ex. Theodoto* 78.2)—a historicizing formulation repeated at the end of the nineteenth century by Paul Gauguin on one of his most famous paintings (*D'où Venons Nous / Que Sommes Nous / Où Allons Nous* [1897/1898]). Writing in 1932, the American historian Carl Becker argued that it is the *memory* of what we have said and done that is the "fundamental thing which enables…[us] to have…a history" (Becker 1969 [1932], 10 – 11). This ordinary mnemonic proclivity for producing our history is, in the conclusion of historian Sam Wineburg, simply "our psychological condition at rest, a way of thinking that requires little effort and [that] comes quite naturally" (Wineburg 2001, 19). The mind of Everyman, in other words, seems to be characterized by historiographical cognition, whether that history has an actual or a mythical quality.

According to the title of Giles Fauconnier's and Mark Turner's study of conceptual blending (2002), Everyman thinks with narratives. The literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall argues that this human facility for narrative is an evolutionary-based strategy which allows for an imaginative exploration of complex social relationships while avoiding the ambiguities of social realities (Gottschall 2012). While narrative might well be foremost in the way we think, it is not the only way—I have previously written about "lists" for example, a genre of genealogical relationships that dominates the earliest written materials (Martin 2007, 42).

Initially, historical and comparative studies of religion were often understood as historical genealogies that were neither narrated nor listed but modeled with the diagram of a family tree. This tree-model was borrowed, of course, from the philological models of Indo-European languages from which the study of religion emerged and which it emulated. Thus the Austrian linguist and ethnographer Wilhelm Schmidt argued for a history of religions rooted in an *Urmonotheismus* that, over time, branched into the plurality of religious alternatives (Schmidt 1912). The dominant understanding of early Christianity still employs such a model, whereby the historical diversities of Christianity are commonly represented as branching from a tree rooted in the founding actions and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The late-nineteenth – early-twentieth century *Religionsgeschichtlicheschule,* which studied religion as a socio-cultural phenomenon that evolved with human culture, modeled their history as a kind of inverted tree, tracing religion from the plurality of primitive polytheism to a triumph of ethical monotheism.

The tree model of historical change and relationships is, of course, based on a view of singular origination as presented in the Genesis story, which dominated Western views of history until the nineteenth century and which represents mythological origins as much as historical change (Shryock and Smail 2011, 16–17; Shryock *et al.* 2011, 32–38). When, however, this mythological tree was felled by the halberd of nineteenth-century science, little consensus remained about how to understand the plurality of non-Christian, as well as Christian, religious evidence that is dispersed over time and in space.

Fundamentally, the problem faced by historians of religion, as by all historians, is that their evidence is not only diverse but fragmentary (Stark 1996, 23). Thus, no matter how many new discoveries are made and "thick descriptions" assembled, a von Rankean account of "how things really were" will always remain elusive; the historical reality is that all the data is never in, nor will it ever be. The problem is not the discovery or gathering of more data but how to make sense of the data at hand.

A simplistic analogy for this historiographical problem is the children's game of connect the dots. In this game, children are presented with dots on a piece of paper, which, like the diverse fragments of historical evidence, are seemingly unrelated. Unlike the historical evidence, however, the dots in the children's game are numbered, allowing the children to connect them in a way that represents some image that is replicable to anyone playing that same game. So, for example, in one familiar exemplar game, connecting five dots that are numbered in diagonal opposition produces the image of a star; this same star is infinitely replicable as long as the dots are connected in the given numerical sequence. Were this an example of a historical problem, a solution would be suggested that involved a network of reciprocal relations.

Since historical evidential dots are unnumbered, however, they may be connected in alternative ways. For example, the evidential dots could be connected contiguously to form a pentagram; were *this* an example of a historical problem, the same data would suggest a relationship of data defined by their mutual occupation of a common space. Given the same evidence, in other words, a set of unnumbered dots, this solution while entirely plausible is nevertheless diametrically opposed to the former—a characteristic of many revisionist histories. Although the numbers of possible connections are constrained by the evidential dots, unnumbered dots could nevertheless be connected arbitrarily to produce various nonsensical diagrams—a solution that has characterized far too much historiography. It is, in other words, the historians' task to reconstruct a historical event by connecting the dots of their fragmentary evidence in the most plausible way. Plausible reconstructions of historical occurrences not only depend upon a critical evaluation of evidence but, as von Ranke already emphasized,

upon a theoretical commitment by historians that supports the probable historiographical reconstruction of the relationships allowed by that evidence—whether that commitment is implicit or explicit.

Historiographical theory

If historical thinking is an ordinary process of human cognition, then academic historio*graphical* thinking is a specialized and professionalized version of this ordinary process that corrects—or should correct—the "common sense" biases of the ordinary thinking (Becker 1969 [1932], 16–23; Collingwood 1956, 268). It should do so, it would seem, by replacing "common sense" with reflective theoretical stances. The British historian Neville Morley notes that advocates of theory in historical work "insist that un- or undertheorised historical accounts are inadequate, because they depend on a set of implicit and problematic assumptions masquerading as 'common sense.'" On the other hand, the more positivistic historians, who question the use of theory, "maintain that any account of antiquity using modern concepts and theories is illegitimate and misleading, as the evidence has been corrupted and distorted with anachronism" (Morley 2004, 1).

Over the years, historians have proposed a number of theoretical models for "connecting-the-dots" of their historical data and, thereby, "fill-in-the-gaps" of the historical record, which have, indeed, proven to be anachronistic. These include such approaches as the dynamics of dialectical materialism, formal rational choice theory, the role of social networks, dynamic population models and social epidemiology (Stark 1996, xii), most of which have been found to reflect contemporary views and values imposed on historical agents (Stark 1996, 23).

Since the 1990s, however, some historians have begun to reconsider the biocognitive universals of *Homo sapiens* that have been established by evolutionary theory as a frame for historiography (Martin 2011, 3–6). Even as Darwin's evolutionary theory represented a historicization of biology, a number of historians, including historians of religion, became intrigued with the idea of employing evolutionary theory for explaining historical change and development already with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859). For example, in 1882, the comparative anatomist Alexander Macalister presented his evolutionary history of the Christian church to the inaugural meeting of the Dublin Presbyterian Association (Macalister 1882). The address seemed to have been well received since Macalister notes in his Preface that it was printed at the request of "some of those who heard it"—although he does acknowledge that others "seem to have thought that [his] line of thought tended to the depreciation" of their re-

ligion (Macalister 1882, 3–4)—an ambiguity about scientific approaches to the study of religion that continues to the present day.

Perhaps the most audacious historiographical proposal based on evolutionary theory to date is the recent programmatic agenda of Harvard historian Daniel Lord Smail. In his groundbreaking work *On Deep History and the Brain* (Smail 2008), Smail proposes a history of *H. sapiens* beginning with the African origins of the species ca. 80,000 BC which focuses on our evolved biocognitive substrate. For Smail, this history would trace the development of, changes in, effects of, and relationships between various practices and behaviors that have violated, manipulated, or modulated our evolved neurochemical systems within various environmental and historical contexts.

However, few historians have actually produced comprehensive studies that employ an evolutionary frame. A notable exception is the Canadian historian Gregory Hanlon who has written a *mentalitiés*-type history of the Tuscan village of Montefollonico in the seventeenth century (Hanlon 2007). Hanlon organizes and interprets the results of his detailed archival evidence in terms of Darwinian evolutionary themes of governance, cooperation, competition, reproduction and exchange. Citing the Belgian philosopher of science Robert Franck, Hanlon notes that the theoretical constraints of evolutionary theory—"the larger context" for proximate contextual causes—sets the limits of what can and cannot occur or endure beyond the short term" (Hanlon 2007, 8). And, the evolutionary biologist Peter Turchin employs evolutionary theory as a frame for his comprehensive study of *War and Peace and War: The Rise and Fall of Empires* (2007), a study of human ultrasociality or the ability of *H. sapiens* to cooperate in groups of millions and more of genetically unrelated individuals. The well-known works of Jared Diamond are, of course, also explicitly informed by evolutionary theory, especially *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (1991) and his *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997).

Although a number of historians of religion have turned their attention to evolutionary theory, few have actually employed such frames in their historiographical work. Rather, many scholars of religion are still spending their efforts debating the value of such an approach—if they expend any effort in this area at all. Others engage in crypto-apologetic debates about whether or not "religion" is itself a naturally selected evolutionary product and, therefore, a socially beneficial adaptation.[193] This latter debate analogizes historical change and cultural

193 Among those who argue that religion is a socially beneficial adaptation are David Sloan Wilson (2002), and numerous articles by Joseph Bulbulia (Victoria University, New Zealand) and Richard Sosis, who largely follow Wilson in understanding religion as an evolved social adaptation (e. g., Bulbulia 2006; 2009; Bulbulia & Sosis 2011; Sosis & Bulbulia 2011).

developments to the biological model of variation and natural selection, an analogy that, in my judgment, is weak and unproductive (Martin 2008a)—an example of what British wag Raymond Tallis considers an immoderate instance of "Darwinitis" (Tallis 2011, 168).

Properly, evolutionary theory describes *natural* causes for human behaviors in terms of the ultimate Darwinian imperatives of biological survival and reproduction and, of course, those proximate strategies for realizing these ultimate ends. The cognitive sciences have been perhaps the most successful in identifying proximate causes specifically within an evolutionary context, namely those evolved mental capacities and constraints of *H. sapiens*. But what might be the contribution of cognitive science to historiography?

Cognitive historiography

Historians, like cognitive scientists, are concerned with human minds. As concisely formulated by the American historian of ancient history Chester Starr: if one is to understand "any era of the past, one must be able to penetrate into the minds of its inhabitants" (Starr 1965, 27). Similarly, the German sociologist and philosopher of history Georg Simmel contended that:

> Mind is the material of history...If history is not a mere puppet show, then it must be the history of mental processes...[T]hose matters which come first in the rational order of things—the cognitive functions of the mind—come last from the standpoint of our awareness and our observation (1905, vii, 39, 43).

Cognitive scientists, like evolutionary psychologists, now agree that the morphology of the human brain and the functions of that morphology have changed little, if at all, over the past 100,000 years, well outside the constraints for the 80,000 year deep history proposed by Smail. Since these scientists also agree that mind is constrained by brain, the minds of "modern and historical people are sufficiently similar in general cognitive function to warrant a meaningful comparison" (Lisdorf 2010, 235)—and the cognitive sciences are increasing our knowledge about modern minds exponentially.

Few historians of religion, however, have acknowledged the challenge of cognitive historiography suggested by Starr and Simmel—despite the argument made already in 1994, by Tom Lawson, himself a historian of religion and one of the founders of the field of cognitive science of religion, that history, like any human production, is a product of the human minds which require cognitive explanation (Lawson 1994, 481–495). Although some scholars have made pioneer-

ing studies in this area, they have all been limited to considerations of specific historical problems. And while some of these studies have *in concert* addressed the history of a specific religious tradition—particularly Graeco-Roman religions[194]—no one has yet produced a sustained historical study framed by cognitive theory comparable to those of Hanson and Turchin framed by evolutionary theory—a historiographical poverty that leaves many historians of religion still doubting the value of evolutionary and cognitive theorizing for their study of religion (e. g., Stausberg 2005, 151).

This lack of a sustained cognitive history of any religious tradition is unfortunate, for the cognitive sciences can provide empirically and experimentally tested theoretical models which can allow historians to connect the dots of their data with a greater level of confidence than has previously been the case (Martin 2002, 31)—for example Thomas Lawson's and Robert McCauley's ritual competence and ritual form hypotheses (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002), Dan Sperber's cognitive attraction theory of cultural stabilization and transmission (Sperber 1996), Harvey Whitehouse's ritual modes theory of religious transmission (Whitehouse 2004) and Roy D'Andrade's cognitively framed "cultural schemas" (D'Andrade 1995) have all been productively employed to connect the dots of historiographical evidence in the study of religion.

In addition, the evolutionary and cognitive defaults identified by cognitive scientists include a number of developmentally early behavioral practices and mental figurations frequently associated with either scholarly or with "folk" understandings of "religion" and can offer explanations for their existence and historical perseverance. These include the detection of agency in the environment, which provides an evolutionary advantage for any organism since it alerts that organism to possible predatory threat. However, our capacity to identify agency in the environment often results in false positives based on partial or faulty sensory input, i. e., an identification of agency where none exists. Secondly, experimental evidence has shown that we have a developmentally early "theory of mind" or disposition for an "intentional stance," that is, for viewing the behavior of others in terms of their assumed mental properties (Dennett 1987). This intentionality, appropriate-

194 Among others, I might mention Roger Beck's and Aleš Chalupa's work on the Roman cult of Mithras (Beck 2006, Chalupa 2011) , Douglas Gregg's studies of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (Gragg 2011), Anders Lisdorff's innovative work on the preservation and spread of Roman prodigies (Lisdorf 2004), Panayotis Pachis's study of the Graeco-Roman Isis cult (2014) and Esther Eidinow's study of luck and fate in classical antiquity (2011)—in addition to my own attempts to explore the usefulness of the cognitive sciences for understanding the early Christianities as well as the Roman cult of Mithras (e. g., Martin 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, Whitehouse and Martin 2004, Martin and Sørensen 2011).

ly associated with other agents with whom we must interact in our environment, can also become associated with false-positive agency, resulting in an imagined agent-causality for events in the environment, e. g., for creation. Unreflective perceptions of agent-causality, whether actual or imaginary, evoke similar responses and motivate similar behaviors. Understanding these responses and behaviors can help historians to explain otherwise puzzling human beliefs, ideologies and actions. One markedly recurring human action is ritual. Evolutionary psychologists and social anthropologists have shown that ritualized behavior is a universally common practice whereby an environment is organized (Boyer and Liénard 2006). Religious rituals are but an institutionally structured subset of this ordinary behavior. So disenchanted, these behaviors become more accessible to scientific as to historical understanding.

The theoretical object of a cognitive history of religion would not be a *Heilsgeschichte* of the gods and their divine entourages and chosen peoples, nor one of presumed cultural manifestations of "the sacred." Rather, the theoretical object of a cognitive history of religions would be that of the recruitment and exploitation of those default evolutionary and cognitive biases by those institutions, ideologies, and practices that have been deemed "religious" at some point or other in human history. Already in 1909, the Cambridge classicist Jane Harrison had proposed a research program that anticipated, within the frame of Darwinian theory, such a cognitive history of religion. Citing Darwin's expectations for the future of psychology, Harrison proposed an evolutionary history of religion that would focus on "the necessary acquirement of each mental capacity [for specific religious practices and ideas] by gradation" (Darwin 2003, 458; Harrison 1909, 497). Her proposal for understanding religion as a suite of evolved behavioral features presciently articulates the agenda of contemporary evolutionary psychologists and cognitive scientists. According to these scientists, the behaviors and mental representations identified by evolutionary and cognitive theorists—such as biases for agent causality, teleology, sociality, the fundaments of morality, for example—are, because of the common evolutionary history of *H. sapiens*, transcultural and transhistorical characteristics of *H. sapiens* and of their behaviors. Such panhuman proclivities should, consequently, be of central concern to historians—to the extent, of course, that we get the science right. (We must recognize that inquiries into the complexity of human minds and their functions are, after all, still new areas of scientific investigation).

Although shaped by historical antecedents, cultural contexts and the cognitive capacities of historical subjects, explanations for historical events and change cannot, of course, ever be reconstructed with certainty from among the range of possibilities these sets of variables allow. This is not only because of the complexity of these variables and the number of their possible relationships, but also because

much history is a consequence of accident. As Nobel Prize recipient Daniel Kahneman rightly contends, "[t]he idea that large historical events are determined by luck is profoundly shocking, although it is demonstrably true" (Kahneman 2011, 218). Nevertheless, knowledge of antecedents, contexts and cognition allow for a retrodictive reconstruction of historical events and change with some approximate degree of accuracy. An understanding of cognitive, in addition to material, constraints may, however, well temper Kahneman's surprise of the seemingly accidental character of historical change. That is to say, historical data, including those of the history of religions, are produced and transmitted—at least in principle—in historically, contextually, and cognitively tractable ways. Nevertheless, few of the historians of religion who have employed cognitive approaches to specific historical problems have addressed what is potentially their most significant contribution, namely, the problem of historical change (but see Martin 2009b). Those who have, have largely employed the literary implications of conceptual blending for understanding textual transmissions, for example, Ted Slingerland's work on the fourth-century BC Chinese text of *Mencius* (2008, 185–206), and Hugo Lundhaug's analyses of early gnostic texts (2010).

In addition to employing cognitive insights and models in their historiographical work, historians of religion can productively participate in the cognitive project generally, by assessing the "real-life" validity of cognitive models. After all, if behavioral and cognitive defaults identified by evolutionary psychologists and cognitive scientists are, in fact, panhuman proclivities, then their effects should be readily documented from what is known from the entire deep history of *H. sapiens*.

Conclusion

James Laidlaw, who describes himself as social anthropologist who is "well-disposed" towards "the cognitive sciences" (Laidlaw 2007, 211), has acknowledged that developments in cognitive science have real consequences for social anthropology in general and the study of religion in particular. Nevertheless, he cautions his colleagues that these consequences should not be "exaggerated" with an expectation that interpretation will be superseded or encompassed by scientific methods (Laidlaw 2007, 212). This same emphasis on the compatibility of interpretation and explanation was emphasized already by Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley, the founders of the field of cognitive science (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 12–31). Similarly, as I have emphasized elsewhere, I, in no way, mean to suggest that cognitive historicizing can or should replace traditional historical methods (Martin 2007, 51–52). Nevertheless, a cognitive historiography, including a cognitive historiography of religion, can draw upon well-

founded theory that can supplement and provide correctives to traditional historiographical tools. It can do so by identifying and explaining data that have been produced by ordinary processes of human cognition but that have otherwise been neglected in favor of more explicit forms of evidence that historians have, for one reason or another, come to privilege—principally texts, which are themselves, of course, constrained products of human minds to be explained rather than unembellished reservoirs of historical facts. Cognitive theories can contribute insights into how and why some representations of historical behaviors emerged, were favored and remembered, but not others that may have been historically, culturally or cognitively possible or present. They also offer explanations for how and why some representations but not others have been exploited by religious institutions as efficient ways by which elaborated and complex information, such as theologically elaborated codes of morality and religious ideologies, have been legitimated and successfully transmitted over time.

Perhaps those historians of religion currently engaged in framing their historical work with evolutionary and cognitive theorizing might collaborate with other academic historians to move towards the scientific historiography promised at the end of the nineteenth-century.

Epilogue: The Future of the Past

Whereas theoretical and experimental work in the cognitive sciences is necessary for cognitive theorizing, a cognitive historiography is perhaps the most promising way for actually realizing a scientific study of religion. And the initial works on specific historical problems that employ such a cognitive historiography, which I have cited above, supports that promise in that they go beyond theoretical constructions and laboratory experimentations to engage in actual cognitive history of religions research and explanation.

However, this promise for a scientific study of religion is compromised by what Robert McCauley identifies as the fragility of the modern scientific enterprise generally (McCauley 2011, 279 – 286). Scientific inquiry has been independently pursued throughout human history, in fifth and fourth century BC Greece, for example, in China from the first century BC until the fifteenth century AD, and in Arabic-Islamic civilization until the thirteenth century (Huff 1993; McCauley 2011, 90, 276 – 277). These pursuits all floundered, however, because of a failure of social and political will to provide the material conditions and intellectual commitment necessary to sustain such inquiry. Have conditions changed with modern Western scientific pursuits? Given the historical trajectory of scientific achievement over the past 150 years, one might be optimistic about the future

of the scientific enterprise. Given a deeper historical perspective, however, one is more wary. And, in the face of the fragility of the scientific enterprise, there is, of course, the "natural" appeal of religion (McCauley 2011, 279–286). The naturalness of this appeal is based on the cognitively optimal and mentally attractive defaults of *H. sapiens* that have been exploited by religious institutions and which tend to persist even among scientists and intellectuals, including among scholars of religions themselves.

Historical predictions, whether positive or negative, like any attempt to predict future trends, tend to "regress to the mean"—to adapt a counterintuitive model from statistics to historical change (Kahneman 2011, 175–184, 190–191, 194–195). That is to say, what are presently perceived either as historical innovations or stagnations tend over time to revert to a central tendency or probable expectation. And, as Donald Wiebe has fastidiously documented, the 150 year history of the academic study of religion is characterized by a pervasive and purduring mean of religiosity (Wiebe 1999, esp. 141–162, 255–275). As Kahneman warns, all "nonregressive predictions will be found to be biased" towards a current situation, based as they are on overly confident causal intuitions (Kahneman 2011, 190–191). Accordingly, Wiebe and I have argued that it is unlikely that a scientific study of religion will ever be established as an academic field —as opposed to an innovative but restricted area of specialized research (Martin and Wiebe 2012). This assessment, we maintain, is neither pessimistic, as some colleagues have judged it to be, nor, obviously, is it optimistic. Rather, we maintain on historical and scientific grounds, that it is a *realistic* assessment—that the future of the study of religion will inevitably differ little from that of its past.

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